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AND OTHER SERMONS

BY FRANK A. FREACH  
OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY  
NEW YORK

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BY J. H. GILBERT

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NO. 1

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MECHANICAL



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**T**HE Editor's principal View in this Collection, is to promote the Interests of rational and manly Piety. The Sermons contained in it are not upon Points of curious and intricate Enquiry, nor upon the Topics of any particular Sect or Party, but upon the most interesting practical Subjects. Their general Tendency is to enforce Moral and Christian Virtues by Christian Motives; to shew, that Religion tends to the Perfection of our reasonable Natures; that it is our highest Honour, and our highest Interest.

In the Choice of them the Editor has not confined himself to Writers of any particular Denomination, but has taken what seemed to him most fit for his Purpose wherever he found it, without being solicitous whether the Author

was a Minister of the established Church, or a Protestant Dissenter. As his Collection is upon a more extensive, and, if he mistakes not, a more useful Plan, than any that has yet been presented to the Public, he flatters himself it will be acceptable to the serious and candid Reader.

*N. B.* There are in this Collection six Sermons never before printed; two by Dr. *Chandler*, two by Mr. *Clark*, one by Mr. *Francklin*, and one by Mr. *Ratcliffe*.-----The Forms of Devotion are composed by the Editor.

C O N-



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# CONTENTS

## OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

---

### S E R M O N I.

*T*HE Folly and Wretchedness of an Atheistic  
Inclination. By the Rev. Mr. Balguy, Page 1

### S E R M O N II.

*O*f Faith in God. By Dr. Samuel Clarke, 17

### S E R M O N III.

*O*f Loving God. By Dr. Samuel Clarke, 35

### S E R M O N IV.

*G*od's Government of the World, a sure and most  
joyful Truth. By the Rev. Mr. Balguy, 53

### S E R M O N V.

*T*he Nature and Influence of the Fear of God.  
By the Rev. Dr. John Rogers. 69

S E R-

S E R M O N VI.

*The Duty and Advantages of Trust in God.* By  
the Rev. Dr. John Rogers, 82

S E R M O N VII.

*Of Glorifying in God alone.* By the Rev. Dr.  
Lucas, 96

S E R M O N S VIII, IX.

*Of the Glory of God.* By the Rev. Dr. Samuel  
Clarke, 119

S E R M O N X.

*Of acknowledging God in all our Ways.* By the  
Rev. Mr. Abernethy, *Diphenter* 152

S E R M O N XI.

*The Reasonableness of Religion.* By the Rev.  
Mr. Amory, *Diphenter* 173

S E R M O N XII.

*The Advantages of Prayer.* By the Rev. Mr.  
Amory, *Diphenter* 195

S E R M O N XIII.

*Of striving with our Maker.* By the Rev. Mr.  
Bragge, 218

S E R M O N XIV.

*Of the unchangeable Difference of Good and Evil.*  
By the Rev. Dr. Samuel Clarke, 242

S E R-



S E R M O N XV.

*The peculiar Advantages of our Saviour's Doctrine.* By the Rev. Mr. John Orr, 263

S E R M O N XVI.

*The Tendency of Christianity to promote the Happiness of mankind in this present Life.* By the Rev. Mr. Orr, 290

S E R M O N XVII.

*The Inexcusableness of rejecting the Gospel.* By Dr. Samuel Clarke, 310

S E R M O N XVIII.

*A plain Inquiry into the Reasonableness of ridiculing Revelation, and the Merit of Christian Faith.* By the Rev. Dr. Delany, 329

S E R M O N XIX.

*Life and Immortality brought to Light by the Gospel.* By the Rev. Dr. Calamy, 349

S E R M O N XX.

*The Mistake of relying upon Faith, considered, &c.* By Bishop Hoadly, 375

S E R M O N XXI.

*The true, and false, Notions of Repentance, considered.* By Bishop Hoadly, 394

S E R M O N S XXII, XXIII, XXIV.

*The Christian Life described.* By Archbishop Hort, 412

S E R-

S E R M O N XXV.

*The Doctrine of the New Testament concerning  
the Lord's Supper.* By the Rev. Mr. Kippis, 478  
*Disputes*

S E R M O N XXVI.

*Rules for the profitable reading of the Holy Scrip-  
tures.* By the Rev. Dr. Foster, *Disputes* 507

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S E R-





## S E R M O N I.

### The Folly and Wretchedness of an Atheistic Inclination.

By the Rev. Mr. BALGUY.

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PSAL. XIV. Part of the first Verse.

*The Fool hath said in his Heart there is no God.*

**O**F all the false doctrines and foolish opinions, which ever infested the mind of man, nothing can possibly equal that of Atheism; which is such a monstrous contradiction to all evidence, to all the powers of understanding, and the dictates of common sense, that it may well be questioned whether any man can really fall into it by a deliberate use of his judgment. —All nature so clearly points out, and so loudly proclaims, a Creator of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; that whoever hears not

its voice, and sees not its proofs, may well be thought wilfully deaf, and obstinately blind. If it be evident, self-evident to every man of thought, that there can be no effect without a cause; what shall we say of that manifold combination of effects, that series of operations, that system of wonders which fill the universe; which present themselves to all our perceptions, and strike our minds and our senses on every side! Every faculty, every object of every faculty, demonstrates a Deity. The meanest insect we can see, the minutest and most contemptible weed we can tread upon, is really sufficient to confound Atheism, and baffle all its pretensions. How much more that astonishing variety and multiplicity of God's works with which we are continually surrounded! Let any man survey the face of the earth, or lift up his eyes to the firmament; let him consider the natures and instincts of brute animals, and afterwards look into the operations of his own mind: will he presume to say, or suppose, that all the objects he meets with are nothing more than the result of unaccountable accidents, and blind chance? Can he possibly conceive that such wonderful order should spring out of confusion? Or that such perfect beauty should be ever formed by the fortuitous operations of unconscious, unactive particles of matter? As well, nay better and more easily might he suppose, that an earthquake might happen to build towns and cities; or the materials carried down by a flood fit themselves up, without hands, into a regular fleet. For what are towns, cities or fleets, in  
com-



comparison of the vast and amazing fabrick of the universe!—In short the principle spoken of in my text offers such violence to all our faculties, that it seems scarce credible it should ever really find any footing in human understanding.

But is it not there expressly ascribed to the foolish man, and represented as his opinion; which though perhaps he may not think to speak out, he whispers to himself, and *says it in his heart*? But these words seem to require another construction; and will, I believe, fairly admit of it; for the heart of man is generally represented in Scripture as the seat of his affections, rather than of his judgment. Conformably whereto the expression in my text may denote, not the man's real opinion or persuasion, but his inclination and desire. He secretly wishes that there was no God, and endeavours to draw his belief that way as much as he can. If the words be thus understood, as they well may, the subject arising from them will be the extreme folly and madness of so desperate a wish, either in respect of the public or of himself.

To wish against the being of a God is to wish mankind the greatest mischief and distress that can possibly be conceived. It is to wish away the grand support and security of human society, and to overturn the foundations of all trust, faith, and confidence between man and man. Was there no awe of a Supreme Being, no terrors of a future judgment to restrain us, what government upon earth would be able to maintain itself, or find protection for its subjects?

Injuries and outrages, fraud and falshood, would prevail and spread far and wide, and the iniquities of mankind know no bounds.—What wise man would chuse, or even dare to live in a community of Atheists, if such a one could be found? Let us for the present suppose such a one, and that it subsisted under an advantageous and well-chosen form of government. How loose and precarious nevertheless would be the obligations both of the governors, and the governed? The one ruling, and the other submitting, not *in the fear of God*, but only in the fear of each other: The one unawed by any apprehensions of an invisible power, which might call them to an account for male-administration; the other obeying not *for conscience sake*, but from a principle of wrath and civil punishment. But is not virtue amiable, and worthy, and even beneficial in its own nature? And as such, might it not influence, and incline, and oblige the very atheists themselves? Let these points be, in some measure, acknowledged; what follows? The probable welfare of such a community, and the safety and prevalence of their government? By no means, as will be shewn very speedily. But let us first go on to observe that, on the present supposition, that great bond of fidelity, that principal guard and support of life and property, an oath, could have no place at all. That solemn appeal to heaven, for the confirmation of evidence, the decision of controversy, and the prevention of strife, would be thus a quite groundless and impossible thing. And how wretched, how deplorable would be the con-



condition of mankind, was there no God for guilty men to fear, or honest men to invoke! No almighty and all-righteous governor to protect innocence, encourage virtue, and controul the insolence of licentious men.—There would indeed be left the sword of the civil magistrate; and very great occasion there would be for it: But yet it would be, in a great measure, useless for want of direction. For how should evil-doers in this case be convicted? No evidence could be sworn, excepting in the magistrate's name, who might perhaps be deified for that purpose; but unless he could also be vested with a power of searching men's hearts, such an expedient must be altogether fruitless. In order therefore to convict criminals, would it be proper and safe to examine evidence unsworn, and lay the whole stress of every cause on men's bare words? Supposing the world without a supreme governor, this rule might unavoidably take place; but every one must see how fatal the consequence would prove to all societies. For, on that supposition, how small a number of mankind would deserve to be trusted? The credit even of the fairest characters would be very precarious; and as to the generality, they would follow their several humours and interests without remorse or controul.—Again; the restraints of the civil magistrate would be insufficient on another account. For without question there are many dark frauds, and secret villanies that cannot fall under his cognizance. In all such cases men must either be restrained by the authority of their own consciences, or not at all.

And what authority, what power could conscience have, were all apprehensions of a Deity removed and set aside? Considered as God's Vicegerent, it is indeed; and well may be, a powerful principle: But according to the fool's impious wish recorded in my text, the force of it would be diminished and dwindled almost to nothing.—However lovely, and beautiful, and beneficial, virtue may be in itself; and however odious, deformed, and destructive, vice is in its own nature; yet considering the known corruptions and depravations of mankind, these considerations would by no means suffice to keep them in order, and secure the peace of the world, without a sovereign legislator, and the prevailing sanctions of reward and punishment. To be directed merely by the rules of right reason, and influenced by the charms of virtue alone, requires great integrity of mind, a more excellent disposition, and perhaps a more elegant and refined taste, than can ever be expected from the bulk of mankind. They are all capable of being moved by hopes and fears; by the apprehensions of final happiness and misery; but the attractions of moral beauty, and virtuous excellence, can have very little effect on any but men of honour and probity, and indeed a superior turn of mind. And even in respect of these, mere unsupported virtue must be very weak and uncertain, in comparison of that which is accompanied with religion, and connected with it. We plainly see, degenerate as the world is, that innumerable disorders are prevented by the authority of parents, masters, and magistrates; without



without which all societies would soon be subverted, and human life become a meer scene of riot, rapine, and confusion. And if such small clans and communities of men stand in such need of superiors and governors, does not the care and conduct of the whole require a Supreme? Human authority, however it may restrain outward actions, yet cannot take hold of mens consciences. This can only be done by the great searcher of hearts. And yet without it all the governments upon earth would be very superficial, and of small force. We find in fact, how frequently and familiarly men break asunder the very bonds of religion, strong as they are: How much greater lengths then would they run without religion? Who can imagine that the generality of mankind could be held in any tolerable order by the beauty of virtue, or the ties of honour? These might in some measure prevail with a few select spirits; at least while nothing appeared in opposition to them: But in the day of fierce tryal, and strong temptation, it is not to be supposed that any man's integrity should be able to bear up without the supports of religion.—In short, without the belief of a Deity, society could not subsist; or if it did, it would be worse than any solitude. As no government upon earth could answer the purpose of its institution, so the principal blessings and comforts of life would be utterly destroyed. No man could safely rely either on his fellow-creatures, or himself; but mutual jealousies and universal suspicions would produce endless divisions, contentions, and animosities,

sities, to the total subversion of every thing good and desirable in life.

But further; abstracting from society and government, we may go on to consider how the minds and conditions of private persons would be affected by the supposition of a forlorn and fatherless world. Under the tuition and government of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, every thing appears with a comfortable aspect. Men never need to want the purest comforts, and most perfect satisfactions, while *God is their portion*. *From him cometh*, not only every good and perfect gift which we possess at present; but those pleasing hopes, and joyful prospects, which sweeten the cares and toils of life, and lye at the bottom of all our enjoyments. On this account, whether the world frown or smile, the wise man is neither highly transported, nor deeply dejected. Whatever be his lot, the peace of his mind is secured, and his heart at rest. For his hopes are founded on a rock, and his treasure fixed where nothing can touch it.—But, on the other hand, the atheistic scheme reverses every thing; blackens the whole face of nature, and involves human life in darkness and despair. Its better things would yield no contentment, and its worse admit of no consolation: or, in other words, adversity would be insupportable, and prosperity joyless. Prosperity did I call it? The word is improper, and the thing impossible on this mad supposition. Without a God, a Providence, and a future state, there could be no such thing as prosperity, no satisfaction, no real enjoyment for rational beings;

beings ; nor even any true peace and tranquility of mind. No affluence, no variety of worldly goods would be capable of yielding any content to a thinking man. He might entertain himself as he could with secular amusements ; or stupify himself with sensual pleasures ; but what might become of his nobler and better part ? what provision would there be for the man ? Should he engage himself in the contemplation of truth ? To what purpose, if he had nothing to expect beyond this life ? That one truth, if it was a truth, would spoil all the rest, and turn them into mere dreams and shadows. Should he then *apply his heart to know wisdom*, and practise virtue ? With what view could he endeavour to improve himself, to purify his mind, and perfect his nature, merely to prepare for the grave, and fit himself for a state of oblivion ? Would any man freight a ship richly, in order to provide for a certain shipwreck at the end of his voyage ? If it be alleged, that to aim at virtue in such circumstances would not be entirely lost labour, on account of its intrinsic worth and usefulness ; it is readily granted. But alas ! how faintly must it operate under such desperate difficulties and discouragements ? And indeed, excluding the comforts of religion, and the hopes of futurity, no sort of good could be rightly relished. Virtue itself would only be considered and chosen as an opiate to sooth mens minds, and soften their afflictions. And whatever means were used, man's life would perpetually be overcast, and his days pass on in one continued gloom. The more he possessed  
of



of worldly goods, and the higher he rose in his condition and circumstances, the more obnoxious he would be to the fears of death, and the horrors of utter extinction. Whatever advantages and successes he met with would only be the mockeries of fortune : like prizes befalling a man who lies under the sentence of a speedy execution.

And since Atheism corrupts and poisons prosperity, what dismal effects would it produce in adversity ! Would it not immediately turn distress into despair, and misery into madness ? An unhappy mortal deep sunk in troubles and misfortunes, and struggling with innumerable hardships here upon earth, and yet destitute at the same time of a protector and a patron in heaven, is a condition not to be even imagined without horror. Let a man be surrounded with crosses and calamities ; let him be attacked at once by want, pain, sickness, sorrow, and all the varieties of wretchedness ; while he is convinced that God governs the world with perfect wisdom and goodness, he never needs to want solid consolation. Whatever he may endure for the present, he has, or may have, that fund of hope in his mind, that relief in his eye, which are abundantly capable of supporting him. But supposing him void of this hope, and that relief ; what would he then be, and which way would he turn himself ? If any one preached to him the fool's doctrine in my text, would he be able to draw any comfort out of it ? If we suppose him prevailed on to drink of the cup of Atheism ; how would it go down, or sit upon his

his stomach? Would it prove a powerful cordial, and enable him to bear up under the load that lay upon him? Alas! instead of alleviating his sorrows, it would be an infinite addition to them: Instead of yielding him patience and comfort in his distress, it would be apt to confound all the powers of his soul, and drive him to distraction. Doubtless every man in misery, if his sufferings have not deprived him of his senses, must think of Atheism with the utmost regret, detestation, and abhorrence; as it robs him of his only refuge, and leaves him destitute of all possible comfort. He will be so far from *saying in his heart*, or endeavouring to persuade himself *there is no God*; that he will naturally cry out with the Psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? Thou, Lord, art my rock, and my fortress; my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort. When his soul fainteth within him, he will trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

Upon the whole, the thought or wish expressed in my text, is certainly the blackest, most impious, and most execrable one, that ever entered into the heart of man. It may be looked upon as the sum and substance of all possible curses; as comprehending universal ruin. A man had better, infinitely better, wish the sun out of the firmament, and all the lights of heaven extinguished for ever. For these are all inconsiderable in comparison of the great fountain of light and glory; who framed and fixed them in the heavens for the use of his creatures, and  
who

who is ever able to enlighten us with them, or without them.

But perhaps it may be urged in excuse or extenuation of this mad wish, this monstrous inclination, that the foolish and wicked man spoken of in my text, takes it up, as it were, in his own defence. Conscious of his sin and guilt, he cannot but know, that his vicious conduct must highly have offended the righteous governor of the world, if such a governor there be; the consequence of which is greatly to be dreaded. And though *sentence against him be not executed speedily*, yet he knows that such a delay is no argument of impunity. Hence he is lead to wish in secret against God's existence, and to persuade himself, as far as possibly he can, that it may only prove an imaginary terror. And though the proofs of the contrary are more numerous than the sands of the sea-shore, and clearer than the sun at noon-day; yet he shuts his eyes, and darkens his understanding, as well as he can; and thus perhaps deludes himself into some degree of Atheism.

Supposing then this to be a just state of the case, we may readily perceive the desperate folly and stupidity of such a proceeding; and that upon these two accounts: In the first place, can the nature of things be any way altered by this man's wishes and self-delusions? If they cannot, which he certainly knows or may know on the least reflection, what can he propose to gain by them? Should he be able to silence or evade, in some measure, the cries and clamours of his conscience; yet the grand issue and event  
of



of his wickedness will be no way mended or mitigated thereby : on the contrary, it will be rendered much worse. But, secondly, as he trusts to a fruitless and unprofitable expedient, so he fatally neglects the only secure and effectual way of retrieving his condition. Instead of wishing and struggling against God's existence, why does he not endeavour, what in him lies, to propitiate and pacify him ? Is it not, in all respects, his best and wisest course heartily to repent and reform ? Suppose a man engaged in a rebellion against his prince, and accordingly apprehended and convicted ; what means would he use to extricate himself ? Would he take great pains to suppose, and believe, that there was really no such man ? Or would he call in question his title to the crown ? Why neither. Men very seldom act so stupidly in their secular affairs. He would instantly make submission ; acknowledge his crime, and promise inviolable allegiance for the future. And why not the same method followed by rebels against heaven ? Is not the King of Kings as placable and merciful as any earthly prince ? Nay, is he not infinitely more so ? With him, sincere repentance and amendment is secure of a pardon ; though it often unavoidably fails and falls short with the other.—What folly therefore, what madness is it in the sinner, however guilty, to amuse himself with idle imaginations, and senseless projects, instead of embracing the only safe and sure means of relief ? To *say in his heart there is no God*, is to give the lye to his own conscience, and to contradict the whole works of nature  
from

from top to bottom. And to wish there was *no God*, is the wish of a traitor, or a madman ; as including his own ruin, and the destruction of the whole world.—What he should have said, and what every wicked man ought to say, is plainly this ; There certainly is a God ; I perceive it, and am assured of it, beyond all possibility of dispute. But this God is *good and gracious ; plenteous in mercy, full of compassion ; not willing that any should perish, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live.* I will therefore address myself, with deep humility and contrition, to this merciful judge ; and endeavour by a new course of life to render myself an object of his favour and forgiveness.

Having thus briefly represented the heinous wickedness, and horrid extravagance of the suggestion, or wish, set forth in my text ; I shall only beg leave to add the following remark, which naturally arises, and offers itself to our thoughts, from what has been said. — If there be so great folly and impiety in cherishing Atheistic Principles, or wishing there was *no God*, how inexcusably foolish and criminal are those men, who believe and acknowledge a God, and yet live as if there was none ! Who own him in their thoughts and words, and yet *deny him in their works !* Can any thing be more absurd, as well as audacious, than, when a man is thoroughly convinced of the being and perfections of the Divine Majesty, presuming to resist his will, disregard his authority, and confront the laws of infinite Wisdom with the  
blind

blind counsels of his own folly? Surely this is too daring, too desperate for dust and ashes. Shall such a worm, such an insect as man, contend with omnipotence, and act wilfully in opposition and defiance to his Maker? Alas! the fact, however strange, is notorious and common. Though it be absolutely impossible, man should ever *harden himself against God, and prosper*; yet the confidence of his own foolish heart bears him up, and he rushes thoughtless into his own perdition.—But supposing we do not suffer ourselves to sin with so high a hand; yet how prone are we to neglect the honour and service confessedly due to the Divine Majesty? Neither *glorifying him as God*, nor walking before him with that filial awe, and pious reverence, which are plainly the bounden duty of all men, and doubly of Christians. To confess a Heavenly Father, a supreme Lord of all power and perfection, and at the same time pretend it needless to worship him; is contradicting a man's own perceptions, and falsifying what he feels within his own breast. Will any man be satisfied, who finds himself neglected or slighted by his children and servants? No; he sees it to be wrong in itself, as well as mischievous in its consequences; and accordingly never fails to condemn and resent it. How comes it then to pass, that we behave in this very manner towards our common Parent and universal Master? Is God the only parent, the only benefactor, who may be disrespected and slighted by his ungrateful children and dependants? The only becoming answer to these questions is remorse,  
and



and shame, and confusion of face. We are manifestly self-condemned ; and there is no room even for the least shadow of an excuse.—What remains then but that we rectify our thoughts and conceptions of the Supreme Being ; that we ever think and speak of him with all possible reverence ; that we strive to attain an uniform obedience to his sacred will ; that we *worship him devoutly in spirit and truth, and give him the glory due unto his name ; that we enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise :* For on all accounts he is *worthy, infinitely worthy, to receive glory and honour, and adoration, now, henceforth, and for evermore.*



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## S E R M O N II.

### Of FAITH in G O D.

By the Rev. Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE.

---

H E B. xi. 6.

*But without faith it is impossible to please him :  
For he that cometh to God, must believe that he  
is, and that he is a rewarder of them that di-  
ligently seek him.*

**T**HE foregoing chapter is a very earnest and affectionate exhortation to the duty of faith. Ver. 22. *Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.* Ver. 23. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.* Ver. 37. *For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry : Now the just shall live by faith.* That this exhortation might not be ineffectual, for want of men's clearly understanding what the nature of the duty was, to which they were here so earnestly exhorted ; the apostle, in the first verse of this

VOL. I. C chapter,

chapter, proceeds to define distinctly what faith is, and wherein it consists. *Faith*, faith he, *is the substance of things hoped for*, (in the original it is, *the firm and assured expectation* of things hoped for) *the evidence of things not seen*. And what those things are, which being not seen by sense, are yet made manifest by faith, he declares in the words of the text. They are, faith he, *the being of God*, and *the rewards of the life to come*. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. There has prevailed, in modern times, a very different and enthusiastic notion of faith, as if faith, under the gospel, was nothing but a confident reliance upon the merits of Christ, to do all that for us, which he on the contrary expressly requires that we should do for ourselves. When we have heartily endeavoured to obey the commandments of God; and have performed our duty really and sincerely, though very imperfectly; to rely then upon the merits and intercession of Christ, for the acceptance of those imperfect though sincere endeavours; this is indeed the duty and the comfort of a Christian; but it is not what the scripture usually calls faith. Faith is that firm belief of things at present not seen; that conviction upon the mind, of the truth of the promises and threatenings of God made known in the gospel; of the certain reality of the rewards and punishments of the life to come; which enables a man, in opposition to all the temptations of a corrupt world, to obey God in expectation of an invisible reward hereafter.

This



This is that faith, which in scripture is always represented as a moral virtue, nay, as the principal moral virtue, and the root and spring of all other virtues; because it is an act, not of the understanding only, but also and chiefly of the will, so to consider impartially, to approve and embrace the doctrine of the gospel, as to make it the great rule of our life and actions. By this faith it is, that we must be justified; and by this it is, that the antients, whose example is celebrated in this 11th chapter, *obtained*, as the apostle expresses it, *a good report*. The faith of Abraham was, that *he looked for a city which hath foundations*, even the heavenly Jerusalem spoken of in the prophecies, *whose builder and maker is God*, ver. 10. The faith of the other patriarchs was, that *confessing themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, they declared plainly, that they *sought a better country, that is, an heavenly*, ver. 13, 16. The faith of Moses was, that he *chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: For he had respect unto the recompence of reward*; and *endured, as seeing him who is invisible*, ver. 25, 26, 27. The faith of the martyrs was, that *they chose to be tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection*, ver. 35. This is a very easy and intelligible notion of faith; and such a notion, as shews plainly, how faith is not a mere speculative act of the understanding, but a substantial practical moral virtue.

'Tis true; this is not indeed the only sense of the word faith, in scripture; but it is the prin-

cipal and most important sense of it: as may appear by considering, that all the variety of significations, in which the word is used in the different places of scripture, may properly be reduced, for memory and distinctness sake, to these which follow: 1st, The word faith, in some places, signifies that earnest trust and confidence in the power of God, to which, in the apostles times, was annexed the gift of working miracles. Thus, *Matt. xvii. 20. If ye have faith* (says our Lord to his apostles) *as a grain of mustard-seed*; (if ye have that trust in God, that particular kind of faith or dependence on him, that assured reliance on his power, without doubt or wavering, required of you peculiarly at this time; if you have this faith, though ever so small in comparison, answerable in any measure to your present office and advantages) *ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove.* This was a faith required of the apostles at that particular time, and of them only. 2dly, In other passages, the word faith signifies the duty of veracity, faithfulness, or truth. Thus, *Matt. xxiii. 23. Ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law; judgment, mercy, and faith*; faith, that is, fidelity, truth, or faithfulness, in the discharge of any trust reposed in men. Analogous to which, it is also sometimes used for the trust itself, or the thing committed to our charge: Thus *Rom. xii. 6. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering*; [the phrase  
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in our modern language is very difficult, and cannot well be understood without this observation :] *according to the proportion of faith*, that is, according to the nature and degree of the gift or the trust reposed in us, (whether it be prophecy or ministration, or any other office which requires faithfulness in the performance of it) so let every one of us discharge his respective duty. 3dly, Another and much more usual signification of the word Faith, is to denote the whole gospel of Christ, or the Christian religion, in opposition to the ritual works of the law of Moses. Thus, *Acts vi. 7. The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*; that is, embraced the gospel. Again, *Rom. iii. 28. A man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law*; by faith, that is, by the conditions of the gospel. And *Rom. x. 8. The word of faith, which we preach*; that is to say, the doctrine of the gospel. And indeed generally throughout all the *Epistles*, and in the book of the *Acts*, that is the constant signification of the word faith. And the reason why the whole gospel is so often expressed by that name, is very obvious, namely, because the great motives and promises of the gospel, are the invisible things of a future state, which can be discerned by faith only. 4thly, and lastly, In other places of scripture the word faith signifies plainly and literally, and in its most natural sense, a firm belief and persuasion; a firm belief of the being, and attributes, and promises of God. Not (as some understand it) a confident credulity in



they know not what, in whatever their teachers require them to believe; and that perhaps with so much the greater assurance, as the things are more absurd and unreasonable to be believed. Neither does faith signify (as others have contended) a groundless imaginary assurance, and confident reliance on our being unalterably, we know not why, in the favour of God. But it is a rational persuasion and firm belief of his attributes discovered by nature, and of his promises made known in the gospel; so as thereby to govern and direct our lives. Thus the word is used in the first verse of this chapter, *Faith is the substance (a substantial well-grounded expectation) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* And in the words of the text, *Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

To *come to God*, signifies, according to the nature of the Jewith language, making profession of religion; undertaking to live a holy and virtuous life, in obedience to God's commands, and in expectation of his rewards. And it answers to another phrase of the like import, *walking with God*; which signifies continuing and persevering in that religious practice, whereof coming to God is the beginning or entrance. Thus Gen. v. 22. *Enoch walked with God*; and vi. 9. *Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God.* Walking with God, is being perfect or steadfast in that religious course of life, whereof coming to God

God is making the first profession. He that cometh to God, is as much as to say, whosoever will be a virtuous or religious man : In like manner, as, he that cometh to Christ, signifies more particularly, he that will take upon him to be a Christian. *No man can come to me*, says our Saviour, *John vi. 44.* (that is, he cannot become a good Christian) *except the Father which hath sent me, draw him ;—every man that hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.* The phrase, *except the Father draw him*, is, in our present manner of speaking, difficult and unusual ; but it is explained by what follows, *he that hath learned of the Father.* The meaning is, No man can effectually believe in Christ, except he first believes in God. Natural religion is the best preparative for the reception of the Christian. The love of truth and virtue in general is the dispensation of the Father ; and the doctrine of the gospel in particular, is the dispensation of the Son. Now as no man can receive Christ, who has not first heard, and is thus drawn by the Father ; as no one can be a good Christian, who is not first resolved to be a good man ; so no one can hear the Father, can come to God, unless he first have faith, and believes in him. The dispensation of the Father, that of creation or natural religion, is a necessary preparative for the dispensation of the Son, that is, for the gospel. And it must itself have preparation made for it by faith going before, as by the first foundation of all. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

The sense therefore of the text is this: 'Tis in vain to make profession of religion, without being first well instructed and firmly persuaded of this foundation; the Being and Attributes of God. There is no Christian, who is not well apprised of this; and may be apt to think, perhaps, 'tis needless to remind him of it. But there are few who consider these first principles of religion, so seriously and so frequently as they ought to do; and in such a manner, as to cause them to produce their proper effect, by influencing their whole lives and conversations. For knowledge is but a dormant habit, if not excited by constant meditation; and powers are of no use, if not produced into act. Right notions of the Being and Attributes of God, every one knows, are the foundation of all religion: But then this knowledge must not be a bare speculation; but a serious, practical, affecting impression, and deep sense upon the mind, of a Supreme Being, who created the world by his power, preserves and governs it by his goodness and wisdom, and will judge it with justice, mercy, and truth: Of such a Supreme Being, whose glory no eye can behold, whose majesty no thought can comprehend, whose power no strength can resist, from whose presence no swiftness can flee, from whose knowledge no secret can be concealed, whose justice no art can evade, whose goodness every creature partakes of: This is that *faith*, without which it is *impossible to please God*. It is impossible to please him without it; not that virtue and righteousness, if it were possible to find them without faith, could be in themselves



unacceptable to God ; but that, because without such faith there can be no righteousness, therefore neither without it can God possibly be pleased. Righteousness is the only means, by which rational beings can obtain the favour of God ; and therefore since faith is necessary in order to righteousness, 'tis consequently necessary to the obtaining of the favour of God. He that will please God must come to him in the ways of virtue and true holiness ; and he that *cometh to God, must first believe that he is.*

From what has been said upon this head, we may easily dissipate the vain fears of many pious and sincere persons, who are very apt to be suspicious of themselves that they want true faith, and consequently that their religion is vain. Now this fear, in such persons, evidently arises from want of having a distinct notion what faith is. They are possessed of the thing ; but for want of clearly understanding the notion, they are not able to judge rightly whether they have it or not. From the explication which has now been given of that matter, men may easily examine themselves, whether they have that faith, which I have been describing, or no. And without entering into the definition at all, there is yet a plainer rule given us by our Saviour ; by its fruits we may know it. Where-ever the fruits of righteousness and true virtue are found, there cannot be wanting the root of faith, from which those fruits proceed : For he that cometh to God does certainly believe that he is ; and gives the best proof in the world that he does so. On the contrary, whosoever, upon examination,

nation, finds not in his life the fruits of righteousness; whatsoever his speculative understanding may be, yet in the Christian sense he may be sure he has no faith. For if the spring, the cause, the active principle were present; there would not be wanting its proper effect. Such as the root is, such will be the branches. He who seriously believes that God is, will endeavour to come unto him in the ways of truth and righteousness.

Having thus briefly explained the former part of the words; and shewn both what faith is, and how absolutely necessary; as without which it is impossible to please God, or to come unto him; it remains that I consider, in the latter part of the words, those two fundamental instances or primary objects of faith, laid before us by the apostle; namely, the Being of God, and his relation to us; *that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* The first foundation of all, and the primary object of faith, is the Being of God; *he that cometh to God, must believe that he is.* Now the grounds or arguments upon which our faith in this particular is built, besides the evidence and authority of revelation, are, from reason itself, and from the very nature of things, many and various; there being hardly any thing in nature, from whence the certainty of the being of God may not justly and reasonably be deduced. Some of the arguments are abstruse, and require attention; but, when thoroughly considered, conclude most strongly to the conviction of obstinate unbelievers. Others are plain, easy, and  
obvious,

obvious, suited to all capacities; always ready at hand to confirm the faith even of the meanest understandings; and yet differing from the former, not in strength, but in being more common only. It would be tedious to repeat at length upon this head a great number of arguments, among Christians to whom they have been so often urged, and are so well understood. But by a brief recapitulation, to remind ourselves of things already known, for the better assisting of our meditations; cannot but in many cases be very useful. For me, saith St. Paul, to repeat unto you the same things, is not grievous, and for you it is safe. To this purpose, the numerous arguments, which prove (in particular) the being of God, may be naturally reduced to the two which follow.

First, That 'tis evident, both we ourselves, and all the other beings we know in the world, are weak and dependent creatures, which neither gave ourselves being, nor can preserve it by any power of our own: And that therefore we entirely owe our being to some superior and more powerful cause; which superior cause, either must be itself the first cause, which is the notion of God; or else, by the same argument as before, must derive from him, and so lead us to the knowledge of him. If it be said, that we receive our being from our forefathers by a continued natural succession, (which however would not in any step have been possible, without a perpetual providence) yet still the argument holds no less strong concerning the first of the whole race; that he could not but be made  
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by a superior intelligent cause. If an atheist, contrary to the truth of all history, shall contend that there may have been, without any beginning at all, an eternal succession of men; yet still it will be no less evident, that such a perpetual succession could not have been without an eternal superior cause; because, in the nature of things themselves there is manifestly no necessity, that any such succession of transient beings, either temporary or perpetual, should have existed at all.

Secondly, The other argument, to which the greatest part of the proofs of the being of God may briefly be reduced, is the order and beauty of the world; that exquisite harmony of nature, by which (as St. Paul expresses it, *Rom. i. 20.*) *the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.* And this argument, as it is infinitely strong to the most accurate philosophers, so it is also sufficiently obvious even to the meanest capacities. Whose power was it that framed this beautiful and stately fabric, this immense and spacious world? *that stretched out the north over the empty place, and hanged the earth upon nothing?* Job xxvi. 7. That formed those vast numberless orbs of heaven<sup>b</sup>, and disposed them into such regular and uniform motions? that appointed the sun to rule the day, and the moon and stars to govern the night?<sup>c</sup> that so adjusted their several distances, as they should neither be scorched by heat, nor destroyed by cold? that encompassed the earth  
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<sup>b</sup> Ps. xix. 1. cxlvii. 4.

<sup>c</sup> Ps. civ. 19.

with air so wonderfully contrived, as at one and the same time to support clouds for rain, to afford winds for health and traffic, to be proper for the breath of animals by its spring, for causing sounds by its motion, for transmitting light by its transparency? that fitted the water to afford vapours for rain, speed for traffic, and fish for nourishment and delicacy? that weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; and adjusted them in their most proper places for fruitfulness and health? that diversified the climates of the earth into such an agreeable variety, that in that great difference, yet each one has its proper seasons, day and night, winter and summer? that clothed the face of the earth with plants and flowers, so exquisitely adorned with various and inimitable beauties, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them? that replenished the world with animals, so different from each other in particular, and yet all in the whole so much alike? that framed with exquisite workmanship the eye for seeing, and other parts of the body, necessarily in proportion; without which, no creature could have long subsisted? that beyond all these things, indued the soul of man with far superior faculties; with understanding, judgment, reason and will; with faculties whereby in a most exalted manner *God teaches us more than the beasts of the field, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.* Job xxxv. 11.

'Tis commonly alledged by unbelievers, that all these things are done by second causes. And  
suppose

suppose they were, (which however is not universally true : but suppose they were effected by second causes) yet how would that diminish the necessity of acknowledging the first cause ? If among men, many things are performed by the use of instruments ; are those things therefore ever the less justly ascribed to the hands which used the instruments ? Because every wheel in a watch moves only naturally, according to the frame of its parts, and the strength which the spring impresses upon it ; is therefore the skill of the workman the less to be acknowledged, who adjusted those very things ? Or because 'tis natural for the wheels of a watch, or for the rooms of a house, to be of such particular shapes and dimensions, does this make it possible, that therefore they may have been formed so without any artificer ? All natural, all second causes, are nothing else, but either the inanimate motions of senseless matter, or the voluntary motions of dependent creatures. And what are these, but one of them the direct operation ; and the other, only the free permission, of him who ruleth over all ? Men's neglecting therefore to infer the being of God, from every thing they see or think of every day, is in reality as great a stupidity as if from the constant and regular continuance of the day-light, men should cease to observe, that there is such a thing as the sun in the heavens, from whence that light proceeds. Nor would it be more absurd to imagine, that the light would continue, tho' the sun, which causes it, were extinguished ; than that the effects of nature can regularly go on,



on, without the being of God who causes those effects. To evade this argument there is no other possible way, but to affirm either that all things were produced by chance, or that they are all eternal necessarily of themselves. As to chance, 'tis evident that is nothing but a mere word, or an abstract notion in our manner of conceiving things. It has itself no real being; it is nothing, and can do nothing. Besides, in the works of God, the further men search, and the more discoveries they make, the greater exactness they constantly find; whereas in things done either by the art of man, or by what we call chance, the contrary always is true; the more they are understood, the less accurate they appear. Beyond all credulity therefore is the credulousness of atheists, whose belief is so absurdly strong, as to believe that chance could make the world, when it cannot build a house; that chance should produce all plants, when it cannot paint one landscape; that chance should form all animals, when it cannot so much as make a lifeless watch. On the other hand therefore, if they will affirm that all things are eternal; yet still the argument holds as strong as before, that things which cannot for any time exist without a cause, can much less without a cause exist thro' all time. Unless they will affirm, that all things exist by an internal absolute necessity in their own nature. Which that they do not, is evident from hence; that there exists in the world an infinite diversity of things, whereas necessity is uniform and without variation.

Having

Having thus briefly shewn that God *is*; it will easily follow in the next place, that he is, and must be, *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. For he that governs the motions of every even the smallest particle of lifeless matter, and by whose providence every vegetable, and every the meanest animal is perpetually preserved; without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground; and with whom, even the very hairs of our head are all numbered; shall he not much more take care of us, O we of little faith? Now the proper and principal care or government over rational creatures, is the rewarding or punishing them according to their respective deserts. If therefore God *is*, (as hath before been proved) and is Governor of the world; it follows that he must be also (since therein principally all government consists; he must be) *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*.

The application of what has been said, is briefly, 1st to Scepticks, and 2dly, to Believers.

1st, To such as are Scepticks, or unbelievers of the being of God, 'tis adviseable in the first place, that they consider how uncomfortable their opinion is. 'Tis plain, such is the condition of human nature in this life, that we are continually surrounded with evils which we cannot prevent, with wants which we are not able to supply, with infirmities which we cannot remove, with dangers which we can no way escape. Our enjoyments are such, as are not for one moment secure; our expectations of such things as are not in our own power to accomplish.

plish. We are apt to grieve for things we cannot help; and to be tormented with fears, of what we cannot prevent. And in all these cases, there is no substantial comfort, but in the belief of God; and in the singular satisfaction of having him our friend. Had the thing therefore really in itself any uncertainty (which is by no means the case) yet it could not but be what every wise and reasonable man must desire and wish might be true, that the world were governed by a wise and just and merciful God.<sup>d</sup> So that even scepticks themselves cannot but be self-condemned, when they mock and scoff at religion; when they refuse to hear arguments for the truth of the most desirable thing in the world; and will not examine those evidences and proofs of religion, which are really much stronger than these persons can before-hand imagine. And if the proofs were much weaker than they are, yet they would deserve at least to be seriously considered; because the hazard on one side is infinitely great, if religion, which they reject, be true; whereas on the other side there is no hazard at all, if, being received as true, it could possibly prove to be a mistake.

2dly, To sincere believers, the use of what has been said, is; that being once satisfied in the main and great truths of religion, they suffer not themselves to be moved, and their faith in this great point shaken, by nice and uncertain disputes about particular questions of less mo-

<sup>d</sup> *Quid habet ea res lætabile aut gloriofum?*



ment. For, which way soever many such controversies of an abstruse and difficult nature be determined; yet the great foundation of religion, upon which a wise man may always act steadily, is laid deep and sure in this plain proposition, that *God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*



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## S E R M O N III.

Of Loving G O D.

By Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE.

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MATT. xxii. 37, 38.

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; This is the first and great commandment.*

**I**N these words there is observable; 1st, The duty enjoined; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*: 2dly, The circumstances requisite, to make the performance of this duty acceptable and complete; *Thou shalt love him, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*: 3dly, The weight, and importance, of the duty; it is *the first and great commandment*.

I. The duty enjoined, is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*. A duty, in every man's mouth, of all religions, and in all sects: but, upon what ground its obligation is founded, and in what par-

particulars the rational practice of it consists, is not so clearly and universally understood. Men often talk very earnestly of loving God, while at the same time they in their doctrine represent him as the most hateful being in the universe; cruel, and partial; arbitrary, and tyrannical; shewing favour to some, and making others miserable, for no other reason, but because he has absolute and irresistible power. But what such persons speak concerning loving of God, is evidently nothing but mere forms of empty words, without any meaning or signification at all; because there is in their minds no real object, upon which the love they speak of can be fixt. And where the root thus is rottenness, (to use the prophet Isaiah's comparison) what wonder if the blossom, and the fruit, accordingly goes up as dust? what wonder if the expressions of their love towards God, end in nothing but peevishness, contentiousness, and perhaps hatred towards their brethren? A true love of God, must be founded upon a right sense of his perfections being really amiable in themselves, and beneficial to us: and such a love of God will of necessity shew forth itself, in our endeavouring to practise the same virtues ourselves, and exercise them towards others, which we profess to love and admire in him.

All perfection is in itself lovely and amiable in the very nature of the thing: the virtues and excellencies of men remote in history, from whom we can receive no personal advantage, excite in us an esteem whether we will or no: and every good mind, when it reads or thinks  
upon



upon the character of an angel, loves the idea, tho' it has no present communication with the subject, to whom so lovely a character belongs : much more, the inexhaustible fountain of all perfections, of perfections without number, and without limit ; the center, in which all excellencies unite, in which all glory resides, and from which every good thing proceeds ; cannot but be the supreme object of Love, to a reasonable and intelligent mind. Even supposing we ourselves received no benefit therefrom, yet infinite power, knowledge, and wisdom in conjunction, are lovely in the very idea, and amiable even in the abstract imagination. But that which makes these perfections most truly and substantially, most really and permanently, the object of our love ; is the application of them to ourselves, and our own more immediate concerns ; by the consideration of their being joined also with those relative and moral excellencies, which make them at the same time no less beneficial to us, than they are excellent absolutely in their own nature. Then is God the complete object of Love, when together with the notion of infinite power, knowledge, and wisdom, we consider him moreover as actually governing the world ; and when, in the exercise of that dominion over us, we consider his truth and faithfulness, his justice and impartiality, his equity, mercy, and goodness towards his creatures ; when we consider his goodness in giving us being, and a being so excellent ; his care in making such plentiful provision, for our temporal preservation, and for our eternal happiness ;

his mercy, in sending his Son to redeem us from death, and to procure pardon even for the greatest of sinners upon their true repentance; when we consider these things, I say, then is it that God truly appears the complete object of Love: for so our Saviour himself teaches us to argue; *Luke vii. 47.* To whom much is forgiven, he will love the more; and the apostle St. *John, 1 John iv. 19.* *We (says he) love him, because he first loved us.*

This therefore is the true ground and foundation of our Love towards God. But wherein this Love towards God consists, and by what acts it is most properly exercised, has sometimes been very much misunderstood. Men of strong passions and warm imaginations have been too apt to place it in a mere enthusiastic zeal of affection, a sort of scholastic speculation, unintelligible and fruitless; seated in the fancy only, instead of the understanding; and having no effect upon the will or actions in the general course of a man's life. By which means, they make the Love of God a thing entirely distinct from the love of virtue and righteousness: whereas the Scripture always speaks of them as being one and the same; judging of men constantly by that never-failing rule, of discerning the tree by its fruits; and always representing men to have just so much Love towards God in their hearts, as they pay obedience to his laws in their actions. The only distinction found in Scripture, is that our Love of God is sometimes used in a more restrained sense, as distinguished from the Love of our neighbour;  
and

and then it signifies, that which is usually called our duty towards God; worshiping the true God, and him only, in opposition to all false gods; and placing our whole faith and trust in him accordingly. At other times 'tis used in a more general sense, as including our whole duty both towards God and towards men; righteousness towards men being inseparable from a true Love towards God; and it being impossible, that he who loveth God, should not love his brother also. But in both these senses, whether it be understood according to the more limited, or the more general, interpretation, it always signifies a moral virtue, not a passion or affection; and is therefore in Scripture always with great care explained and declared to mean the obedience of a virtuous life, in opposition to the enthusiasm of a vain imagination. In the Old Testament, Moses, in his last exhortation to the Israelites, thus expresses it; *Deut. x. 12. And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to love him?* And what is loving him? Why, he tells them in the very next words, *'tis to walk in all his ways, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes which I command thee this day for thy good.* In the New Testament, our Saviour still more distinctly expresses the same thing, inculcating and repeating it in such a manner, as shews plainly his foreseeing at that time in his own mind, how apt men would be to misunderstand it: *John xiv. 15, 21. If ye love me, saith he,*



*keep my commandments: he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.* And in his prophecy concerning the signs of the end of the world he puts Love towards God, as the opposite to iniquity; thereby plainly declaring it to mean the same as virtue: *Matt. xxiv. 12. Because iniquity shall abound, the Love, saith he, of many shall wax cold.* And the beloved disciple, who, as he leaned more nearly upon his master's breast, so he seems in this matter to have been more particularly inspired with his master's sentiments; *Whoso, says he, keepeth his word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected; hereby know we, that we are in him: for this is the Love of God, that we keep his commandments, 1 John v. 3.* And again, *2 John vi. This, says he, is Love, that we walk after his commandments.* And, effectually to prevent such men's enthusiastic notions of religion as judge of their Love towards God by any empty speculation, any warmth of zeal in matters of opinion, by any passion, or affection whatsoever, wherewith the mind or imagination may, without any real fruit of virtue and righteousness, fancy itself transported; the same apostle frequently gives us this one sure rule, in which there can be no deception; that we measure the truth of our Love towards God, by the extent and proportion of our Love towards our neighbour. *1 John iii. 17. Whoso seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the Love of God in him? Again, ch. iv. 12, 20. No man hath seen God at any time; if we love one*

*\* 1 John ii. 5.*

*another,*

*another, God dwelleth in us, and his Love is perfected in us : if a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ?* The argument is : God who is invisible, can no otherwise be shown to be the object of our Love, than by our delighting to obey and imitate him, in acts of righteousness and charity, and universal goodwill towards mankind, who are visible and always with us. *This <sup>f</sup> commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also ;* that is, that whosoever pretends to love God, should prove the truth of what he professes by his behaviour towards men. *For by this we know, (as the same apostle goes on, ch. v. 2.) that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments.* The words from their connexion with what went before, seem to be transposed ; and that they should not be read thus, *that we love the children of God, when we love God ;* but on the other side, *by this we know that we love God, when we love the children of God, and keep his commandments.* Those who place the sum of their religion in imposing upon men blind notions and unintelligible opinions ; and hate and persecute all who differ from them ; and, by endeavouring to compel others in their own hypocrisy, fill the world with cruelty, violence and oppression ; these persons, I say, do in one respect act extreme wisely ; that they discourage men, as much as they can, from reading and studying

<sup>f</sup> ver. 21.

the Scriptures with their own eyes ; lest they should there see it set forth, in so plain, so clear, so bright, so perpetual and unavoidable a light, how different, how contrary, their spirit is to the spirit of Christianity, which is the spirit of Love. For, if they who rightly teach the true doctrine of Christ, shall yet be bid to depart from him, if in their own private lives they be workers of iniquity ; much more shall the same sentence be pronounced on those, the manner of whose very teaching is itself a work of unrighteousness, violence and oppression. But to proceed : as the Scripture thus expressly, so the reason and nature of the thing itself no less plainly, shows, in opposition to all superstitious notions, that Love towards God, and virtue or righteousness of life, are in reality only two different names of one and the same thing. For, what is rational Love, but a desire to please the person beloved, and a complacency or satisfaction in pleasing him ? To love God therefore, is to have a sincere desire of obeying his laws, and a delight or pleasure in the conscience of that obedience. Wherever this obedience is not found, men may talk what they please, of ardent Love and devotion towards God, of the highest zeal and even fury for his service ; it is all nothing but most certain hypocrisy. For whatever specious pretences the wit of man may invent, our Saviour's argument will for ever stand good ; *Mēn do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles.* The tree will always be known by its fruit. Love towards God, will always show forth itself in doing his will. *If a*



*man love me, saith our Saviour, he will keep my words, John xiv. 23.* To love God, is to love goodness, righteousness, charity, and truth: if therefore to love these virtues, and live at the same time in the practice of all the contrary vices be a contradiction; for the same reason it follows, that, to pretend to love God, and at the same time practise the vices which he hates, is a contradiction also. *As he only who doth righteousness is righteous;* so he only who doth what is pleasing to God, can be said to love him. To love God, and yet delight to disobey him, is a manifest inconsistency; and therefore the Psalmist's admonition is both an argument of reason, and a rule by which to try men; *Psf. xcvi. 10. Ye that love the Lord, see that ye hate the thing which is evil.* In Scripture, wicked men, and evil spirits, are elegantly stiled enemies and haters of God: not that they oppose or withstand his power; for that is impossible; but because they hate his laws, and delight in what he forbids. In like manner therefore on the other side, Love towards God is also impossible to be expressed by any benefit we can do to him, but can be testified only by our love of righteousness, and by our practice of virtue. Even to an earthly superior, to a parent, or a prince, Love can no otherwise be shewn from a child or a servant, than by chearfully observing the laws, and promoting the true interest, of the government he is under. There is this difference only; that earthly superiors are then only to be obeyed, when they command what we see  
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to be just and right: but God, who, being infallible, can never command what is wrong, is for that reason absolutely to be obeyed in all things: only, to prevent the errors, and the frauds of men, whether impious or pious frauds, very great heed is to be taken, in matters of weight and importance, that whatever is pretended to be a command of God, be really and indeed such.

Lastly: That the Love of God and the practice of righteousness, are one and the same thing, appears from those texts, wherein all relation of men to God, is declared to be founded upon virtue only. Thus the title of sons of God, *Rom. viii. 14. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* And *Phil. ii. 15. That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God.* The title of friendship likewise: *Jam. ii. 23. It was imputed unto Abraham for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God: He was called;* that is, he was so styled in the Old Testament by God himself, *Is. xli. 8; and 2 Chron. xx. 7. Thou, Israel, art my servant, the seed of Abraham my friend.* Our Saviour gives the same title to his apostles, upon the same ground; *John xv. 14. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* And still more emphatically, *Matt. xii. 50. Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.* Christ acknowledges no relation, but what arises from religion only; nor regards any declaration of Love towards him, other than that of obe-

obedience to his commands in the gospel. St. Paul elegantly pursues the same similitude, 2 Cor. v. 16. *Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.* His meaning is; all temporal personal knowledge and friendship, such as was between Christ and his natural relations here upon earth, now disappears; and no man knows Christ, or is known of him, any otherwise than in proportion as he obeys his laws. The like is to be observed, concerning that title given to the Jews, of being God's peculiar people: for they only were so in the spiritual and religious sense, who in practice, not who in profession, served the true God. Gal. iii. 28; and Col. iii. 11. *There is neither Jew, nor Greek; there is neither male nor female; neither Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ (that is, obedience to Christ) is all in all.* And ch. v. 6; and 1 Cor. vii. 19. *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.* And the same is fully expressed in that declaration of John the Baptist, when he says, that even out of the *stones of the street*, God could raise up children unto Abraham: children unto him, in the spiritual and best sense, who for his exemplary obedience had this testimony given him, that he is called in Scripture (Rom. iv. 16.) *the father of the faithful.*

Now from this account which has been given, of the true nature of Love towards God, it will be easy for us to correct the errors which men have sometimes fallen into in both extremes.



tremes. Some have been very confident of their Love towards God, from a mere warmth of superstitious zeal and enthusiastic affection, without any great care to bring forth in their lives the fruits of righteousness and true holiness. And the error of these men may be corrected, by considering, that God being essentially just and good, holy and true, and of all other moral perfections; 'tis consequently evident, that unless they consider him under these characters which are inseparable from his nature, and unless they accordingly love (and themselves imitate) these virtues; 'tis not God whom they are zealous for, but a mere abstract notion, a phantom only of their own imagination.

On the contrary; others there are, who tho' they really love, and fear, and serve God, in the course of a virtuous and religious life; yet, because they feel not in themselves that warmth of affection which many enthusiasts pretend to; therefore they are afraid and suspect that they do not love God sincerely, as they ought. Now the error of these pious persons is to be corrected, by considering, that there is no other mark so infallible of the goodness of a tree, as the fruit which it brings forth. If they live in obedience to the commands of God, they need no other evidence of the sincerity of their hearts towards him: for all other signs may possibly be erroneous; but this is the very thing signified itself. Love of goodness, righteousness, and truth, is Love of God: for God is goodness and truth: and he who loves these virtues, which are the moral perfections of the Divine Nature, does

does therefore love God most perfectly ; because he loves those excellencies, for the sake of which God expects that we should love him above all things.

But further : there are some persons of this sort, who are fearful that their Love towards God is not entire and perfect, and that they do not love God as the chief good, if they obey and serve him for the hope of reward. But this also is a great mistake : for as happiness, no less than holiness, is essential in the Divine Nature ; so in all inferior beings, the proper reward of virtue is inseparably desireable with virtue itself : and not the desire of heaven, which is the perfection of virtue ; but only the desire of sinful pleasure, which is destructive of virtue, is inconsistent with, and diminishes from, our Love of God. The Scripture expressly declares, that <sup>g</sup> he who cometh to God, not only may, but *must believe him to be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* : that Abraham accordingly, that great father of the faithful, <sup>h</sup> *looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* : that <sup>i</sup> *Moses had respect unto the recompense of reward* : that the <sup>k</sup> *martyrs suffered in hope, that they might obtain a better resurrection* : that <sup>l</sup> *our Lord himself endured the cross, for the joy that was set before him* : and that the end of all good men's faith is *the salvation of their souls, even joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*<sup>m</sup> The hope of which joy, the apostle, in that very verse,

<sup>g</sup> Heb. xi. 6.    <sup>h</sup> ver. 10, 14.    <sup>i</sup> ver. 26.    <sup>k</sup> ver. 35.  
<sup>l</sup> ch. xii. 2.    <sup>m</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

not only supposes to be consistent with, but speaks of it as being, itself, our Love of Christ.

II. Having thus at large explained the duty enjoined in the text, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*: I proceed now in the second place, to consider briefly the circumstances requisite to make the performance of this duty acceptable and complete: Thou shalt love him *with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*. In *St. Luke* it is, somewhat more distinctly; with all thy heart<sup>n</sup>, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind. Which words, tho' sometimes used promiscuously, yet, when thus put together in order, seem intended to express, after a more distinct manner, the requisite circumstances of that obedience, which is the proper evidence of our Love towards God. And

1st, It must be sincere: we must love or obey him with all our heart. 'Tis not the external act only, but the inward affection of the mind principally, that God regards: an affection of mind, which influences all a man's actions in secret<sup>o</sup>, as well as in public; which determines the person's true character, or denomination; and distinguishes him who really is a servant of God, from him who only seems or appears to be so. It was the character of the Jews of old, and is now of too great a part of Christians, *Ezek. xxxiii. 31. With their mouth this people shews much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness; i. e. after their sinful pleasures.*

<sup>n</sup> Luke x. 27.      <sup>o</sup> Matt. vi.



2dly, Our obedience must be universal: we must love God with all our soul, or with our whole soul. He does not love God, in the Scripture-sense, who obeys him in some instances only and not in all. *No man*, says our Saviour, *can serve two masters: and if any man love the world, the Love of the Father is not in him.* 1 John ii. 15. And *Jam. iv. 4. Whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.* The meaning of these passages is not, that he who truly loves God, must consequently wholly neglect, and have no regard at all to any thing else; but, that nothing else must so possess our affections, as to interfere with our duty, when they come in competition, and thereby render our hearts, as the Scripture expresses it, *not right*, or *not whole*, with the Lord. Thus Saul was tempted to spare the best of the Amalekite's goods, expressly contrary to God's command: and the Jews, under pretence of the Corban, of giving somewhat to the service of the temple, excused themselves from providing for their necessitous parents: and many who have zealously taught the doctrine of Christ, shall at the day of judgment be bid to depart from him, because they have allowed themselves in the practice of some unforsaken iniquities. The Psalmist places his confidence in this only, that he *had respect unto all God's commandments.* Ps. cxix. 6. Generally speaking, most men's temptation lies principally in some one particular instance: and this is the proper trial of the person's obedience, or of his Love towards God. If he overcomes in this instance, then may he have confidence towards

God ; but if he fails here, and continues so to do, he is guilty of all. By forsaking the sin that most easily besets us, we must endeavour to improve daily and grow in grace ; aiming at the character given in the gospel to Zacharias, that he was *perfect, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless*. The meaning is ; not that our obedience can in this life be indeed sinless ; but that we must be sincere in endeavouring to avoid all sin, according to the measure and possibilities of our present frailty ; 'till at last we be presented really *faultless, before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy*.

3dly, Our obedience must be constant and persevering in time, as well as universal in its extent : we must love God with all our strength ; persevering in our duty, without fainting. *He that endureth to the end, saith our Saviour, the same shall be saved ; and he that overcometh, shall inherit all things ; and, we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end*. The Scripture-notion of obedience is, *walking in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life, Luke i. 75*. The meaning is, not so as never to fall into any sin, but so as never to apostatize from our duty by falling finally into any course of sin. *The just shall live by faith ; but if any man draw back, says God, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*. For Christianity is a warfare, wherein we must *not only fight, but so fight, as to overcome ; and a race, wherein we must not only run, but so run, as to obtain*.

4thly,

4thly, Our obedience to God, ought to be willing and chearful : we must love him with all our mind. *Pf. v. 12. They that love thy name will be joyful in thee :* and St. Paul, among the fruits of the Spirit, reckons up peace, and joy *in the Holy Ghost*. Nevertheless, this ought not to be matter of scruple to any weak and sincere mind : for obedience to the commands of God, whatever principle it proceeds from, even tho' it be but fear only, will be accepted unto salvation. But virtue becomes more perfect, when 'tis made easy by love, and by habitual practice incorporated as it were into a man's very nature and temper. For so the Scripture represents *angels*, as *rejoicing and delighting* to perform their Lord's pleasure : and our Saviour declares that 'twas his *meat and drink* to do the will of his Father which is in heaven. Which examples when we can in any tolerable degree imitate, then is fulfilled in us the observation of St. *John*<sup>p</sup>, that *perfect Love casteth out fear* ; and that of St. Paul, *Rom. viii. 15. that we have not received the spirit of bondage to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father ;* and 2 *Tim. i. 7. God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of Love, and of a sound mind.*

These are the circumstances requisite to make the performance of this duty acceptable and complete : we must love the Lord our God, with all our *heart*, with all our *soul*, with all our *strength*, and with all our *mind*. The

III<sup>d</sup> and last thing observable in the text, is the weight and importance of the duty : it is the

<sup>p</sup> 1 John iv. 18.



*first and great commandment.* The reason is, because 'tis the foundation of all; and, without regard to God, there can be no religion. Not that virtue, at any time, or in any person whatsoever, can be not praise-worthy; much less, that in those who have not a right knowledge of God, even virtuous actions themselves are (as some have very unreasonably affirmed) only *splendid sins*; but that there is no security, no certain depending upon such virtues, as arise merely accidental from natural goodness of temper, and are not built upon a firm and settled persuasion, that God does now govern, and will finally judge the world. The house is good; but it is built (according to our Saviour's comparison) upon the *sand only*, and not upon a *rock*. 'Tis *faith only*, that *overcomes the world*: nothing but a steady belief of a judgment to come, and of God's being *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, can be effectual to conquer the temptations of sin. This faith therefore, that we may all hold fast, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

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## S E R M O N   I V.

God's Government of the World, a sure  
and most joyful Truth.

By the Rev. Mr. BALGUY.

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PSAL. xcvi. Part of the first Verse.

*The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.—*

Or, according to the other translation,  
*The Lord is king, the earth may be glad thereof.*

**T**O acknowledge a Deity, and yet suppose, as some of the heathen philosophers pretended to do, that he is altogether unconcerned either in the creation or government of the world, is owning him in words, and disowning him in reality. In like manner, to confess that God made the world, and all things therein, and at the same time deny his care and providence over it; is, in effect, maintaining a God without Divine Attributes. It is maintaining inconsistent opinions, and separating things es-

sentially united. As sure as there is a God, so sure it is that he must be supremely wise, and infinitely good. But to create the world, and then leave it to itself, and all the confusion consequent thereupon, is a conduct impossible to be reconciled with either of those perfections. If our clearest ideas are to be trusted, there would be no wisdom, no goodness at all in such a procedure. For whatever ends might be proposed in the production of such a forlorn world, they might not possibly be answered. Neither the Creator's glory, nor his creatures happiness, could be in any measure accomplished without a Providence. And as to any other intentions, we are not able to frame any conception of them. However, they must needs likewise be ineffectual, and frustrate on the same supposition.

But let us examine the grounds of this important doctrine somewhat more particularly and distinctly. Strictly speaking, the creation necessarily requires the continued influence and perpetual support of its Creator. The natural world could not subsist a moment without the Almighty Hand which first formed it. Should God be pleased at any time to withdraw his power and protection, all nature must sink in an instant. Most certainly every thing would immediately run to ruin, and probably fall to nothing. Both reason and revelation assure us, that *by him all things consist. That he preserveth and upholdeth all things by the word of his power. That in his hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. And that in him we live, move, and have our being.* In this respect



spect therefore, God's Providence not only stands on firm foundations, and sure evidence, but appears absolutely necessary; since the world could no more continue without his aid, than it could exist without it at first. The great machine of the universe, so wonderfully framed and fitted as it is, yet cannot go of itself; as unavoidably depending on its Almighty Author, and naturally requiring his concurrence, to keep it not only in order, but in being. Nor does this argue any defect in his workmanship; because an independent system of creatures is not only absurd, but utterly impossible.

Nevertheless, it is not so much this, as another branch of Divine Providence, that we are chiefly to understand by the declaration in my text. God superintends indeed the whole; and governs the natural, as well as the moral world. All creatures are subject to his power and rule, whether they be animate, or inanimate: but when his reign, his dominion, his kingdom are spoken of; we are primarily, if not peculiarly, to understand his government of moral agents, and rational subjects. As these are his noblest productions, and stand at the top of the creation, they must needs be the principal objects of his care and providence. To direct mere matter, and produce out of it so much order and convenience, so much beauty and variety, so much symmetry and proportion, requires doubtless great power and wisdom; but to preside over the intellectual system, to rule not only the *children of men, and the kingdom of the earth*, but all angels, and authorities, and heavenly powers;

such an administration as this is Divine in the highest sense ; and such a kingdom most worthy of him, whose power is boundless, *and his understanding infinite*: and who upon that account is *the only Potentate, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*.

But to proceed ; this kingdom of God, this government of the moral world, being in a more especial manner the doctrine of my text, and indeed most expressly taught throughout the whole Scriptures, need not be more particularly proved from thence. Let us therefore briefly and impartially inquire how it appears to the reason of our own minds.—The question then is, if it can be called so, whether God's creatures, his intelligent creatures, be under his care, protection, and government ; or whether they are wholly abandoned to their own management, and given up to their own guidance. If they be left to themselves, and the government of the world is refused by the maker of it ; no other account can possibly be given of the thing, but that he either wanted power or inclination ; either was not able to execute this great charge, or not willing. And if both these suppositions are evidently false and groundless, the consequence must be the truth of the proposition set forth in my text.—That God neither did, nor could want power to govern the world, is manifest even to demonstration. For not to mention that Omnipotence is an essential attribute of the Divine nature, most certain it is, that he who was able to create the world, must much more be able to direct and govern it ; creation implying and requiring the highest of all power. He  
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who could raise the universe from nothing, and fix it originally in the most exact order, cannot possibly fail of full power to preserve and regulate it. *He who planted the ear, as the Psalmist observes, shall he not hear; he who formed the eye, shall he not see?* Can any thing escape his perception who inhabits eternity and infinity? Who vitally exists every where, and can be absent no where? And as nothing is unknown to him, so nothing is impossible with him. Nothing can resist his will, or make the least opposition to his decrees. Omnipotence knows no difficulties; but with the greatest ease accomplishes whatever it pleases, and subdueth all things unto itself. The whole creation is full of this truth; and every object we meet with, proclaims the incomprehensible power and majesty of him that made it.

Since then it cannot be supposed, without the greatest contradiction to his nature, that God should be *unable* to govern the world; we are next to consider whether he could be supposed *unwilling*. And the resolution of this point will readily be found. For whatever is most agreeable to perfect Wisdom and Goodness, must in this case be fact. Most infallibly God is ever willing to determine, and do, what is wisest and best. Can then any man think it agreeable to perfect Wisdom, that God should be so regardless of the works of his hands, as immediately to lay aside all care and concern about them? That he should make the world, and then forsake it as soon as he had made it? That he should furnish and fit it up in the noblest



blest manner, and replenish it with an endless variety of inhabitants : that he should produce innumerable orders of beings, and ranks of creatures, many of them formed after his own Divine image, and qualified for the knowledge and imitation of himself ; and when he had so done, relinquish the whole, and give every thing up to chance and confusion ? How can such a conduct as this be ascribed to any wise agent ? And much less to infinite wisdom. For as we before observed, whatever ends or intentions the Creator proposed, they could never be accomplished without his direction and concurrence. — But perhaps it may be urged, that the world was framed in such wonderful order and perfection, as to stand in no further need of the Creator's superintendence ; and that his rational creatures were made capable of guiding themselves, and governing those beneath them ; and that thereby the order of the world might be maintained without the Divine interposition. — The answer to which is, that every part of this pretence is groundless. It is demonstrable that the very material world cannot be kept in order by second causes, but continually stands in need of the Creator's influence, as might be shewn at large. And much less could the order and harmony of the intellectual world be maintained without the Divine administration. It is true, men are endued with reason, and angels with more ; but yet both men and angels being endued also with liberty, and imperfect, might act against the light of their own minds, and fall into disorder ; and accordingly

cordingly both have actually done so. On which account, were it not for God's providence and government, it is evident that the moral world, as well as the natural, would become a mere chaos, and fall into inextricable confusion. Is it not necessary for public security, that evil men and evil angels be curbed and restrained? Is it not necessary that innocence be protected, and virtue encouraged? That guilt be exposed and prosecuted, and vice and villainy checked and punished? And how should any thing of this kind be effectually done, if God did not sit at the helm, direct all his affairs, and dispose of all events, according to the rules of righteousness and truth.——But in order to discover the weakness of this plea, we need only take notice how it would hold in any human establishments. Is any thing to be done without rulers and governors? And supposing a set of laws, of the best laws, already made; will they execute themselves? 'Tis very true that men have reason to direct them, and laws of various kinds; but 'tis likewise as true, that many men have wild humours, fierce desires, and furious passions, which frequently prompt them to act in defiance both of law and reason. On which account, and for the enforcement and support of both, an executive power is, and ever will be, absolutely necessary in all states and communities. And must not this observation hold much stronger in respect of the whole creation? If the several societies among men require rulers and governors, and cannot subsist without them; what can we think of the universe itself?

self? Must not the whole stand in greater need of government, than any part? Most certain therefore it is, that the all-wise Creator would never produce such a great and glorious system, and then leave it in a state of anarchy; this being utterly inconsistent with all the rules of wisdom that we are capable of discovering.

Nor is it less repugnant to his righteousness and goodness. As perfectly good, he must propose the welfare of his creatures; and in order thereto, he would not fail to direct and govern them. For as we have already seen, if he had left them to themselves, they could neither expect happiness, security, nor quiet.— Again, his guidance and government of the world clearly follows from the rectitude of his nature. It is impossible that he should be ignorant of the behaviour of his creatures. He must see at all times whether they do well or ill, whether they act virtuously or wickedly; and, as a righteous being, cannot fail to judge them accordingly. If God did not govern the world, no sufficient distinction could be maintained between virtue and vice; nay, in many cases it would happen the latter prospered more than the former. Vice would often succeed and flourish, and virtue fall into extreme distress. Now this, I say, is what a righteous God cannot possibly suffer; not finally I mean. He may suffer it for a season, and in fact we find that he actually does so; insomuch that his government of the world has been sometimes called in question on this very account. But certainly with-  
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out just grounds. The irregular distribution of good and evil in this life is indeed a clear proof of a future state, wherein every thing will be punctually adjusted and set to rights; but it proves nothing at all against the doctrine we are considering. As sure as God is righteous and holy, vice will suffer, and virtue will prevail and prosper in due time. But no reason can be shewn why the present time must needs be the proper time: so far from it, that good reasons may be given for the contrary. However, since it must be done sooner or later, either in this life or the next; since it necessarily follows, from the perfections of the Divine nature, that the righteous will be protected and encouraged, and the wicked punished; and since moreover this can only be done by the great Searcher of hearts; the consequence must be that the world is governed by him:

Should we go on to inquire how he governs it, and presume to search into the methods and measures of Divine Providence, we may easily bewilder ourselves in a speculation vastly too high for us. We have all the reason in the world to assure ourselves that God's government is most perfect, in all respects; but to account for the direction and disposal of particular events, and to discover how far they come under, and coincide with general laws, seem undertakings far above our present faculties.—We do not so much as know, with any certainty, whether there be any just ground for distinguishing, as we ordinarily do, between a general and a particular Providence. All particular events, for  
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aught we know, may be superintended and disposed by general laws. I might explain and confirm this observation by various instances and suppositions ; but I shall only mention at present that which follows ; a supposition not only very antient, but very natural, and therefore more easy to be conceived, and more apt to be entertained.—What I mean is, that the particularities of human life may be specially provided for by a delegation of power and authority to subordinate agents ; by whose invisible intervention, events may be directed agreeably to the will and wisdom of the Supreme Governor : and that perhaps in perfect consistence with the stated laws of the natural world. What absurdity, what impropriety, in supposing such a provision as this for the tuition and government of mankind ? Can we think it any derogation from the honour and majesty of the Supreme Ruler, to invest certain beings of exalted powers and perfections with the administration of his providential decrees ; they presiding over the several parts of the universe, while he himself, who alone is capable of it, informs and directs the whole ? This seems perfectly conformable to that subordination and scale of beings, which prevail throughout all nature, as far as our faculties are able to search. Could we see further, we might probably find every system, every habitable globe, under the government of vicegerents ; and perhaps the various districts and provinces of each divided amongst the host of heaven, and respectively administered according to the appointments of unerring wisdom. If  
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this be agreeable to nature and reason, as must, I think, be allowed ; I may safely add, that it is by no means disagreeable to revelation : so far from it, that we find in Scripture frequent intimations of this amazing scheme of Providence. I see not therefore why it may not be supposed a general law of God's moral government ; and that such a one, as no way interferes, but perfectly consists with his laws of nature.—But I return to what is more directly the doctrine in my text.

Thus then it appears from the plain principles of reason that *the Lord is King*, as we read in my text : and the next thing to be considered is the inference which there follows, *the earth may be glad thereof*. And in truth it is one of the justest and most natural inferences in the world. For what is there in all the compass of nature, or even within the reach of human imagination, that can administer to the minds of men so much true comfort, contentment, and complacency, as this single fact is capable of doing ? The most desirable, and most joyful truth, that can either be uttered, or conceived, is, that *the Lord is King*, and that *his dominion endureth throughout all ages*. If we have any thought, any reflection, must we not needs *be glad* to find ourselves in the hands, and under the protection of that Governor, whose great and constant aim is the safety and felicity of all his subjects ? Who enjoins us no other laws than those of truth and righteousness ; which at the same time are the rule, the inviolable rule of his own actions. A Governor, who  
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never wants power to do whatever he pleases, and who never pleases to do any thing but what is just and fit. Who is gracious, merciful, and long-suffering; full of gentleness, goodness, and loving-kindness; and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*. In short, a Governor, who is so far from dealing with his creatures by any capricious rules, or arbitrary measures; that his will is the very *law of kindness*: all his precepts are favours and blessings, and his very judgments benefactions.

If we reflect on our condition and circumstances in this present world, we cannot but find cause to rejoice on all accounts, that we are under the tuition and administration of the Supreme Being. Considering our wants and infirmities, our frailties and follies, and how unable we are to help ourselves; our whole life ought to be looked upon as a state of minority: even in our best and wisest period, to lose the guardianship of heaven would be certain ruin. This is our grand support and security; and comparatively speaking, the sole foundation of our hope and trust. We are beset on all sides, and threatened from all quarters; are compassed about with a great variety of dangers and distresses. Many difficulties we meet with that we cannot conquer; many obstacles that we cannot surmount. Numberless evils hang over our heads, ready to fall upon us, and crush us, every instant. When misfortunes are at a distance, very often we cannot foresee them; and when we do foresee them, we often know not how to prevent them. And when they arrive,

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and are actually upon us, we frequently are at a loss how to redress them, or where to find a remedy.—We are liable to so many disasters without, and so many disorders within ; are so much exposed to the fury of the elements, and the greater fury of lawless and violent men ; find so many snares and temptations planted in our way ; have so many hazards and hardships to encounter ; such a number of infirmities, corruptions, and evil habits to subdue in ourselves ; and such force, fraud, and falsehood to withstand in others ; that were we deprived of the protection of Divine Providence, we should be left utterly desolate, and sink down into the depths of sin and sorrow, and misery, as naturally *as the sparks fly upwards*.—But, on the other hand, if we consider ourselves as the objects of God's care and concern ; that he is our ruler, our defender, our guide ; and *we his people, and the sheep of his pasture* ; the scene changes, our condition brightens, and every thing appears with a new face. If we take care not to forfeit his favours, nothing need to dismay us ; for nothing can greatly hurt us. *Though we walked through the valley of the shadow of death ; though the earth were removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea ; yet should we need to fear no evil ; for God is our refuge and strength, a present help, and a sure support, in every trouble.* Are we ignorant ? God is omniscient. Are we impotent ? He is almighty. Are we apt to err, and prone to sin and folly ? He is unerring wisdom, and spotless perfection. If he be on our side, what can be against us ? If he protect

us, who can touch us? Are we surrounded with dangers and calamities, troubles and trials; infomuch that our case appears desperate? He can extricate us with the greatest ease, and deliver us in a moment. For all nature is in his hand, and the whole creation at his beck.—So far then we have just cause to rejoice, and be glad, that *the Lord is King*.

But further; as there are many and great evils to be avoided, so there is a great variety of good to be sought after. Many wants and wishes we unavoidably have; many natural desires that require to be gratified; many craving appetites, and clamorous affections, that will be provided for, or continually torment us. Tho' we may subsist, yet we cannot be said to prosper, in a temporal sense, without a competent share of the comforts and conveniencies of life. And had we nothing to depend on but our own endeavours; how little should we be able to make of them? We are apt to ascribe our successes to ourselves, and our own conduct; but doubtless, in a great measure, very unjustly. They are chiefly owing to Divine Providence, and the succours of heaven; which conduct us, though unseen, and carry us on to prosperous events. Without these invisible aids, we should fail, and fall short, in almost every undertaking. No art, no skill, no diligence would avail us, if Providence forsook us. It would only be *lost labour, that we hastened to rise early, and eat the bread of carefulness*, if we had nothing to trust to but our own endeavours. Nor could any of our fellow-creatures insure our success. For,



comparatively speaking, *vain is the help of man, and precarious are all his purposes.*—But though human means be insufficient for the accomplishing of our ends, and the satisfying of our desires; yet what may we not expect from the interposition of heaven, and the wisdom and bounty of God's Providence? What good may we not hope for, if we be not wanting to ourselves? Whatever objects we set our hearts upon; whatever blessings we have in view; if they be fit for us, and we for them, we shall, in due time, assuredly obtain them. And is not this consideration abundantly sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind? If any enjoyment be, in its consequences, *unprofitable* to ourselves, we are false to our own interest if we desire it: and if it be detrimental to the public, we cannot innocently pretend to it. But under these limitations, our pursuits will not fail to be crowned with success.—And what a happiness, what an honour is it to the children of men, to have, I will not say such a Governor, but such a Patron, such a Benefactor, such a Friend? A friend whose power is commensurate to his wisdom, and his goodness to both. A friend, so kind and constant, as never to desert those who do not desert him. Whose favours are inestimable, and his bounty inexhaustible. In a word, on whom we entirely depend for all the blessings of this life, and all our hopes in the next.—Upon the whole, to be under the Divine rule and government, is the most desirable circumstance in the world. To be directed by infinite Wisdom, protected by infinite Power,

and befriended by infinite Goodness, is the happiest situation, and the most glorious privilege, that could belong either to men or angels.

What remains then, but that we cheerfully and thankfully submit to the authority of our heavenly Ruler? That we pay a constant regard, and a willing obedience to his sacred laws; the violation of which is not only rebellion against God, but enmity against ourselves. By disobedience and impenitence, we may turn the *joy and gladness*, spoken of in my text, into grief and terror. For most undoubtedly the *Judge of all the earth will do what is right*. He will not fail to execute judgment on obstinate and incorrigible offenders. But if we obey his laws, and keep his commandments; if we sincerely endeavour to fulfil his will, and discharge our duty; we are sure of his acceptance, encouragement, and favour. Most gently shall we be treated, most graciously indulged, and most abundantly rewarded. *No good thing will he withhold from his faithful subjects and servants.* *Happy then are all they who are in such a case; ye blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.*

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## S E R M O N    V.

### The Nature and Influence of the Fear of G O D.

By the Rev. Dr. JOHN ROGERS.

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PSALM xxxiii. 8.

*Let all the earth fear the Lord: stand in awe of  
him, all ye that dwell in the world.*

OUR passions are the springs which actuate the powers of our nature: if these are either too weakly or too strongly moved, or misled by false apprehensions of the object, the productions must be proportionably defective or irregular. And since the Fear of God is a passion of the first and principal influence in religion, it is of the greatest importance, that it be formed upon such views, as may give it a proper force and direction.

I therefore beg leave to enquire,

I. What is the proper awe and fear, which is due from man to God.



II. To suggest some considerations which ought to possess our souls with this affection towards the Deity.

III. To observe the influence this affection will have on the conduct of our lives.

I. Fear in general is that passion of our nature, whereby we are excited to provide for our security upon the approach of evil. But when this description is applied to the Fear of God, we are not to apprehend that God can be the author of any effect that is evil in itself, though it may by accident be evil to us: his severest inflictions are in themselves acts of justice and righteousness, and flow from the excellencies and perfections of his nature; though with respect to us, they have the evil of punishment, and demand this regard of our Fear to him. The frequent mistakes of men in forming their apprehensions of this object of their Fear, and consequently of the nature of that respect which is due to him, has given rise to that necessary distinction of the Fear of God into a *servile* or *superstitious*, and a *filial* or *religious* Fear. The former we are to avoid as a dishonour to God; the latter we are obliged to as an indispensable duty, the true spring and motive of our Christian obedience. When men represent the Divine Nature to their minds as the author of evil; as a being averse from their happiness, and armed with power only for their destruction; as an austere and rigorous master, easily provoked, and always lifting up his hand to take vengeance; such conceptions must unavoidably raise in our minds the passion of terror, a dread

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of the Divine Nature, mixed with abhorrence and aversion, as from an enemy whom we hate, but dare not resist. But this is so far from that Fear which is a duty required by God, that even the devils are constrained to do this homage to his majesty, who believe and tremble. This is no other than that forced respect a captive pays to his conqueror, a slave to his lord. And the worship we are induced to offer from these mistaken apprehensions of the Divine Nature, is a blasphemous affront to his perfections; since we worship him not as God, but as a cruel and tyrannical being, the idol of our fears, and the creature of our superstition; and we might for the same reasons adore the malice and power even of hell itself.

The Fear then which is acceptable to God, is a filial or religious Fear: an awful reverence of the Divine Nature, proceeding from a just esteem and regard to his perfections, which produces in us an inclination to his service, and an unwillingness to offend him. This is a duty we owe, in some proportion, to all who stand in a superior relation to us, and is in the fifth commandment required towards our prince and our parent, under the name of *honour*; a respect which in the notion of it implies a mixture of love and fear; and in the object equally supposes goodness and power. As a son, though he reverences the authority of his father, and is deterr'd by a just apprehension of his displeasure from daring to offend him; yet forgets not at the same time that he is concerned with the

tenderest affection for his happiness, the protector of his weakness, and the reliever of his wants; one who will look on his failings with mercy, and even correct his offences with compassion: so tho' religion demands our reverence of God, as that sovereign power from whom we derive our being, the judge of all our actions, and the author and disposer of our happiness; tho' it represents him clothed with majesty and honour, as the Supreme Ruler of the world, to whose authority all things in heaven and earth do bow and obey; yet it teaches us at the same time to adore him as a mild and merciful being, of infinite love and affection to his creatures; as a friend and a father, whose care supplies our wants, and defends our impotence; to whose favour we owe all the happiness we can receive here, and from whose compassion in Christ we hope for eternal glory hereafter. This is the proper character of the Deity; and while we thus represent him to our faith, as his goodness will forbid us to dread him as slaves, so his majesty will command us to reverence him as sons. But from that servile dread we reprove as criminal, we must be careful to distinguish that terror and astonishment which is spread over the conscience of the sinner, when he first begins to reflect on the danger of his state, and the penalties he has incurred from the justice of God. For tho' this Fear, in its first impressions, be attended with very uncomfortable views of the Divine Nature, and attends chiefly to the extent of his power, and the rigour of his justice;

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yet whenever it is effectual to our conversion, and engages our applications to appease his anger, it cannot be without some confidence in his goodness, and a regard to the more amiable attributes of the Deity ; and must consequently have also a less perfect degree of that filial reverence recommended by religion.

For if this terror were merely that servile dread which represents God as an implacable, inexorable being, the soul under such an impression would sit down unactive, overwhelmed with an horrible despair ; and never engage in a fruitless attempt to appease a power, whom no prayers could intreat, no repentance reconcile. 'Tis plain therefore, that tho' this Fear be not that composed reverence, with which the soul looks on God in a state of confirmed piety ; yet neither is it that servile dread, which flees from him as an hostile, unfriendly being, delighting in the misery of his creatures. And therefore some of the schools have used a middle term to express this affection, and have called it an *initial Fear of God* : a disposition so far from being offensive to him, that it seems to be properly that broken and contrite heart, with which a soul under the conviction of sin ought to look upon its judge ; and what the Scripture emphatically calls the *beginning of wisdom* ; a temper, which, in the same proportion as we apprehend the justice of God to be pacified by our repentance, will gradually improve into that filial reverence accompanied with love, which (as I observed) is the proper affection of a confirmed piety.

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These distinctions of the Fear of God give us a clear and easy reconciliation of those seeming inconsistencies of Scripture, with respect to this affection: For when St. *John* tells us, that *perfect love casteth out fear*—and again, that *he that feareth, is not made perfect in love*; these assertions can no otherwise consist with those Scriptures which enjoin the Fear of God, and recommend it as the whole of our duty, than by understanding the former, either of that servile dread which reprobates and devils have of God, or rather of that initial Fear which attends the imperfect conversion of a sinner; the latter, of that filial reverence, which is the strength and ornament of the soul, in a composed state of religion.

The nature of the duty thus explained, be pleased to attend me,

II. In some considerations that ought to possess our souls with this affection towards the Deity. Now every one of the Divine perfections are arguments for this reverence towards him. Can we reflect on the infinite knowledge and omnipresence of God, and not stand in awe of that being, who is conscious to all our failings and infirmities, who is about our bed and about our path, who sees, observes, and records every word and action of our lives, and from whom even the most secret thoughts and intentions of the heart are not concealed? Or, can we remember that he is infinitely just, without a religious concern for the event of that day, when we must appear before his impartial tribunal? Goodness, holiness, and mercy, are indeed

deed the immediate objects of our love; but when we reflect on the infinite disproportion, in which these qualities are possessed by God, and the most perfect of his creatures; that the heavens are not pure in his sight, and that he charges even his angels with folly; with how lowly a reverence must we bow down our souls before so excellent a being, and adore a nature so much superior to our own? But the attribute which especially demands this affection from us, is his power. None can resist or interrupt the execution of his will; our happiness and our misery, our souls and our bodies are in his hands; he has power to save, and power to destroy; nor is he accountable to any for his dominion over us. If he be angry, every creature that he has made, is ready to execute his vengeance; and unless his wrath be appeased, an eternity of torments awaits the objects of his displeasure. Now though a just confidence in his goodness must preserve us from a servile dread of his power, and despair of his mercy; yet so unlimited, so irresistible an authority cannot be reflected on, without the most awful reverence, even by those whose piety assures its favour to them. But these arguments arising from the perfections of the Deity, will yet more effectually possess us with this reverence, if at the same time we reflect with a just humility on ourselves. That we are indigent, defenceless beings; the creatures of his power, and the dependants of his providence; so far as we know, the lowest of all intelligent beings; whose strength is weakness, and whose wisdom is folly.



ly. And, what is yet a more mortifying consideration, we have provoked this Almighty Power by our sins ; have affronted his goodness, despised his counsel, and rebelled against his authority. And if prophets and apostles, the favour'd of God, fell down with reverence at the feet even of his angels ; if Moses himself, tho' honoured with the character of his friend, was struck with exceeding fear and trembling, at the glory of his perfections ; if even those holy and unoffending spirits, the angels of his presence, veil their faces, and bow down before the throne of his majesty ; with what awe and reverence should we, sinful dust and ashes, approach that infinite Power we have so grievously offended ? With what humility implore his pardon ? To these considerations of duty, I might add also motives of interest recommending this affection to us : I might observe with Solomon <sup>a</sup>, that *in the Fear of the Lord there is a strong confidence ; that 'tis a place of refuge to his children ; that 'tis the best preservative from all those temporal fears and disquietudes which corrupt the enjoyment, and embitter the lives of men ; since the malice or power of all inferior beings, and even the wills and passions of men, are but instruments in the hand of God, and consequently are no farther to be feared by us, than we apprehend him provoked to use them in our punishment.* But I shall insist only on one argument taken from the effect of this fear, and that is what I

<sup>a</sup> Prov. xiv. 26.

III. Proposed to consider : the influence this affection will have on the conduct of our lives.

In general, the effect of this Fear will be a sincere, universal obedience to the commands of God.

The only motives that can be imagin'd of our obedience to the laws of any person, are either the value and certainty of the rewards he proposes, together with an assurance of his inclination and ability to confer them ; or an apprehension of his justice and severity in punishing our disobedience. Now neither of these, exclusive of the other, is the true principle of our obedience to God. For, if our observance of the Divine laws proceeded merely from an opinion of his inclination to our happiness, whenever his providence or justice should think fit to visit us with any great affliction, he would no longer appear that kind, benevolent being we before worshipped, and consequently the motive that engag'd our submission, would lose its force on us. 'Twas with this imperfect principle of duty, that Satan reproach'd the integrity of Job<sup>b</sup>. *Doth Job (said he) serve God for nought? Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about all that he hath? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.*

Indeed if the Divine laws were proposed to our observance, with no other motives than the

<sup>b</sup> Job i. 9, 10, 11.

advantages attending it, they would be little more than an advice, and have but a very weak influence on the far greater part of mankind, who are more inclined to pursue their happiness, in the satisfactions that lie before them in this life, than to wait on the promises of a distant reversion. 'Tis therefore necessary to engage also the Fears of men by the annexion of such penalties, as by the weight and certainty of them will over-balance the persuasions of temporal pleasure.

On the other side, if our obedience were the effect only of a dread of the power and vengeance of God, it would be no better than the submission of a slave to the tyranny of an insolent master; and must want that choice and inclination, which alone can make our obedience acceptable to God. As he requires a submission to the authority of his commands, so he expects that submission should be accompanied with an entire trust in his goodness, and affection to his service: by the former we adore him as the Lord and Governor of the world; by the latter as our Father which is in heaven. The proper motive therefore of our Christian obedience, is that Fear which is made perfect by love; that filial reverence I have described and recommended, which has in it a just mixture of both these affections, and acts upon our lives with the force of both. This is a principle adapted to every passion and faculty of our nature, to every state and condition of our life; and, when rightly formed, will direct us to the just performance of our duty in all; will equally prepare



prepare our patience for the day of adversity, and engage our gratitude to the mercies of God ; will suggest tears to our repentance, and hallelujahs to our praises ; will make us receive his favours as the blessings, his punishments as the corrections of a father. The awe of his majesty will keep us from presumption, and the promises of his mercy from despair : for as is his majesty, so is his mercy. Both these attributes will be equally in our view, and concur to form the disposition of the soul. If this principle were thoroughly fixed in the minds of men, we should be ashamed of hypocrisy, and tremble at profaneness ; neither hope our treachery could escape the notice, nor our blasphemies the vengeance of God. Our secret actions would be as regular as our public ; our devotions as great in the closet as they appear in the temple : we should perform every instance of our duty, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but with the same sincerity with which we comply with the desires of our friend, or our father : the least of his commands would appear venerable to us, and the most difficult not grievous. In sum, this affection will give warmth to our zeal, and spirit to our devotions ; will animate our faith, enliven our hope, and extend our charity ; will deter us from sin, and encourage us in our duty.

Since therefore this is the true principle of Christian obedience, the only foundation on which the superstructure of religion can rise with a proper strength and beauty, let us labour to form in our minds such just apprehensions  
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of the Deity, as may possess our souls with this reverence towards him. Such as are our conceptions of God, such will be our affection towards him; and such as is the affection of the heart, such will be the service and obedience we shall pay him. Let us therefore take care neither to affront his majesty by want of reverence, nor dishonour his goodness by a servile dread of his power. Both are defects equally destructive of true religion; the one tending to extinguish it, by inclining the mind to a contempt of God; the other to corrupt it by superstition. As therefore the reflection on his goodness should reconcile us with delight to the duties he enjoins; so must we remember that we are to serve him with Fear; and, even in those acts of our worship, which principally engage the mind in contemplating the wonders of his love, not forget the honour due to his majesty, but even rejoice unto him with reverence; and while we approach him with the confidence of sons, humble ourselves before him with the resignation of creatures, and the contrition of sinners. And,

Lastly, Let it not discourage any of us that our conversion from a state of sin to God, is attended with terrible apprehensions of his severity and power, since (as I observed) this is not that slavish dread which destroys religion, but the beginning of wisdom; an impression of Divine grace on the soul, which, duly cultivated, will end in confidence in the mercy, and pleasure in the service of God. The Divine Nature will gradually appear more amiable to us, and even

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our present fears will improve our affection : the mercy of his pardon will endear him to our gratitude, and as we have much forgiven, we shall love much.

In the present state of our infirmity, the soul, I am afraid, can rarely arrive to that just temperament of affection, with which man in his innocence adored his maker. Our imperfect conceptions of the Deity, and the frequent failings and offences to which the best of us are conscious, will debase the honour we pay him, with some alloys of a servile mixture. The proper and adequate reverence due from the soul to God, is perhaps reserved for the perfection of that state when we shall see him as he is in the full beauty of his goodness, no longer armed with the terrors of our judge, no longer offended with our transgressions, but appeased, reconciled, and united to us through Christ.

Let it be our care in the mean time so to fear him here, that we may behold him without dread and astonishment hereafter. That when we shall be called to the awful tribunal of our judge ; when the sinner shall desire the mountains to fall on him, and the hills to cover him from the terrors of his presence, we may be able to approach the throne of his Majesty with the confidence of sons, and be received among the redeemed of the Lord into that eternal state of happiness, where all our fears and labours shall cease, where everlasting love shall be our employment, and everlasting peace our reward.



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## S E R M O N VI.

### The Duty and Advantages of Trust in G O D.

By the Rev. Dr. JOHN ROGERS.

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JEREM. xvii. 7.

*Blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose  
hope the Lord is.*

**W**Henever we reflect on the powers of our nature, and the circumstances of our being, some of the first conclusions that arise to us are, that we are a weak dependent creature, insufficient to our own happiness, full of wants, which of ourselves we cannot relieve, exposed to a numerous train of evils which we know not how to divert, insecure in the possession of the present, and anxious for the future, and therefore that some foreign support is necessary to us, on which we may stay and rest ourselves with confidence of being supplied with what we

want, and protected from what we fear ; a reflection so obvious, that natural instinct seems to have suggested it even to those who never much attended to deductions of reason. In every man's scheme of happiness we shall find upon enquiry some special point of confidence ; something without himself he relies on to be his guard and assistance, to furnish to him the materials of his happiness, and defend him in the fruition of it. Thus we may observe some placing this confidence in the power, influence, and authority of their station ; others with the rich fool in the gospel, trust in their riches, and pronounce rest to their souls in the multitude of their treasures ; others on their parts and abilities, their skill in designing, and their management in execution. These instances may perhaps seem at first view rather to refute than enforce my observation, that man naturally seeks a strength and refuge in something without himself ; for the object of trust here, is either our own natural or acquired power, or at least something domestick and in our possession. But if we go on in the reflection but one step farther, all these schemes must appear to us ultimately to resolve into a confidence in man : for of what advantage are power, or skill, or riches to us, but as they enable us to command, engage, or purchase the services of other men ? The great and the rich depend on the assistances of those whom their power or their wealth attaches to them ; and their inferiors strengthen themselves in the favour and friendship of the

great, which they presume their services or address will assure to them, and the whole skill of each is employed in cultivating and improving these advantages.

But if we suffer ourselves to reason upon such a conduct, and examine the grounds of this confidence, it must appear weak and treacherous in the foundation ; for what is man, even the greatest of men, whose breath is in his nostrils, a creature frail and indigent as ourselves, whose powers, whose very life is limited within narrow bounds, and whose affections change as the wind ? The greater and more formidable part of the evils we are exposed to are such, as it is above the abilities of man to prevent or redress ; and even where it is in his power to serve us, we can have no firm assurance of his inclinations to do it. Here then we cannot sit down, but must still proceed in our search, and look higher for a support equal to our wants : and though, as we pass through the several orders of beings above us, we discern many excellencies, and cannot but desire the favour and assistance of natures so much superior to our own, yet still there appears a mixture of weakness and imperfection ; we are not yet arrived at what we want, neither can we rest with a full trust and satisfaction till we come where religion directs us ; to a Being infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, to God the author and governor of every creature, who can restrain the malice, and command the service, over-rule the powers, and direct the actions of all inferior beings. If we  
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can assure to ourselves the favour of this mighty Being, our concern is at an end; we may here repose ourselves with a full assurance, as on a refuge sure and steadfast, in whose hand are all events, whose wisdom can foresee, and whose power can divert every evil that may approach us, and whose veracity has declared that he will never fail those who put their Trust in him. This Trust and confidence in God, as it is our greatest felicity, so it is also our bounden duty enjoined us by religion, as a condition of that favour and protection we expect from him; and therefore this subject will oblige me to consider,

I. What the duty here required from us implies, or when we may be said to hope and trust in God, as we ought to do.

II. When this trust is grounded as it ought to be, or what conditions are required on our part to assure our confidence in God.

III. The blessedness of him who can thus trust and hope in the Lord.

I. Then this Trust in God is an honour we owe to the supremacy of the Divine Nature, and it is a degree of idolatry to place it on any other being. This duty implies positively an intire resignation to the wisdom, a dependance on the power, and a firm assurance of the goodness and veracity of God: on him we must ultimately rely to supply us with all things needful and proper for us, to give food to our bodies, and pardon and grace to our souls. Whatever our condition or the events of our life may be, tho' our temporal prospects should

be full of danger, or though the days of sorrow should actually overtake us, yet still we must repose ourselves on God, as a Being who loves us as his children, who even corrects us with the mercy of a father, and will in the end make all things work together for our good. *Tho' he slay me* (says Job) *yet will I trust in him*<sup>d</sup>. Nay, tho' we are conscious to ourselves that we have offended him by our sins, though we have provoked him to withdraw the comforts of his holy spirit, and hide his face from us, yet still we must not let go our Trust in him, but look up from the deep into which we are fallen, and depend on the promises he has made us thro' Christ, that he will forgive the penitent, and receive him again into mercy and favour.

Negatively this duty implies, that we should withdraw our confidence from all inferior beings; and in order to this we must begin at home, put off all trust in ourselves, our parts, abilities or acquisitions, how great or how many soever they may be. This trust indeed, in our own natural or acquired powers, as I before observed, ultimately terminates in the friendship and services of other men, which these advantages are presumed to assure to us. But no man, or number of men, how mighty, how good, or how virtuous soever, or whatever presumption we may have of their engagements or inclination to us, must be suffered to rival God in the honour of our confidence; for him has the Holy Spirit pronounced accursed, *who trust-*

<sup>d</sup> Job xiii. 15.

*eth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.* And tho' the blessed angels far excel man in power and wisdom, and we have far greater assurances of their goodness and benevolence towards us, yet our trust must not rest in them: even these glorious beings must be considered by us as our fellow-servants, as instruments only in the hand of God, who applies their services, governs all their actions, and disposes even their wills and affections according to his good pleasure. But the greatest offence against this duty, is placing our confidence in the enemies of God, in evil men or evil spirits. When we pay this regard to the angels of God, we are guilty indeed of a criminal mistake, we honour the servant instead of the master; but they are servants of great dignity, and to whom some respect is due from us, and therefore the error may admit some alleviation: but when we have recourse to the powers of darkness, we declare ourselves associates with the professed rebels against God and his Christ, we deliberately renounce the allegiance we have sworn to him. In sum, the whole system of creatures must be excluded from this honour: tho' we are permitted to rejoice in the possession of any valuable advantages, to cultivate the friendship and engage the benevolence of men and angels; yet our confidence must not terminate here, but be carried on to God, from whose bounty we receive, and at whose pleasure we hold every blessing we enjoy; whose appoint-

\* Jer. xvii. 5.



ment every creature, good or evil, is bound to obey; who only is mighty, who only is the Lord, who alone has power to save, and power to destroy. Let us then,

II. Consider when this Trust is grounded as it ought to be, or what conditions are required on our part to assure our confidence in the favour and protection of God.

For as, with respect to the duty of prayer, the proper means of obtaining from God, the blessings we trust in him for, tho' it be a bounden service we all owe to the Lord of heaven and earth, yet certain qualifications are on our parts necessary to give our prayers any just expectation of success; so likewise in this Trust itself, tho' it be an homage due from us to God, as his subjects and creatures, yet unless we are duly qualified for his favour, our Trust will be a vain and sinful presumption. Now the great and most important qualification for a successful performance of these duties, is a sincere obedience to the laws of God, an unfeigned devotion of the heart to his service, a steady adherence to the faith, and a purity and holiness of life agreeable to the precepts of our religion: wicked men have no interest in the promises of God, but are the objects of his wrath and displeasure. When Rabshakeh was sent to terrify the people of Jerusalem, he argues from this principle against their confidence in God. *If ye say, We trust in the Lord our God; is not that be whose altars Hezekiah has cast down?* Had

his suggestion been true, that Hezekiah had abolished the worship of God and the religion he had established among them, the Assyrian had reasoned justly; a prince and people in such manifest rebellion against their God, could not expect that he should appear in their defence, or rescue them from the calamity that hung over them; but that excellent prince was conscious to himself of his own integrity, of his honest zeal and uprightness of life in the service of God, and relied on this as a sure foundation for that trust he reposed in him, to deliver him out of all his distresses. *Remember, (says he) O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight<sup>g</sup>.* We must examine our lives, and be assured that our ways please the Lord, before we can hope for his favourable interposition; *for his eyes are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the ungodly, and him that delighteth in wickedness, doth his soul abhor.* *If our heart condemn us not, (says the apostle) then have we confidence towards God<sup>h</sup>.* But if our conscience reproach us with unmortified sin, if we have neglected his service, been deaf to his calls, and despised his authority, our hope is the hope of the hypocrite, we may call and none will answer, yea he will laugh when our sorrow comes. One refuge nevertheless remains to the sinner, the last and only anchor of his hope. Let him put away the evil of his doings, and humble himself by a

<sup>g</sup> 2 Kings xx. 3.

<sup>h</sup> 1 John iii. 21.

speedy and sincere repentance : let him return to God whom he has forsaken, and then let him be assured that God will return to him, will take him again into his protection, will be reconciled to him thro' Christ, and restore him to the confidence of a son.

III. The blessedness of him who can thus trust and hope in the Lord, is the third thing I proposed to consider.

If we would draw a short abstract of human happiness, bring together all the various ingredients of it, and digest them into one prescription, we must at last fix on this wise and religious aphorism in my text, as the sum and comprehension of all. Every other scheme we can form appears upon examination weak and defective, perplexed and intricate in the project, full of difficulties in the execution, and precarious in the issue, depending for success on the concurrence of beings either frail and perishing in their nature, confined in their power, or uncertain in their wills and inclinations ; and if any of these circumstances fail us, and none of them can be relied on, the whole scheme is broken, all our plots and contrivances, the pains we have taken, and the skill and address we have shewn in the conduct of them, come all to nothing, and leave us to disappointment and despair. But he who with a just confidence can trust in God is secure from these contingencies. He relies on a wisdom who sees the utmost consequence of things, on a power which nothing can obstruct, on a goodness of infinite affection to his happiness, and who has bound himself by  
promise



promise never to fail those who trust in him. If this God be with us, who or what can be against us? But if he be angry, all our other dependancies will profit us nothing, our strength will be but weakness, and our wisdom folly; every other support will fail under us when we come to lean upon it, and deceive us in the day when we want it most.

Should we carry our enquiry no farther than after present felicity, how much better is it secured to the man who trusts in God, than to him whose dependance is on the creature? The hope of the former is founded on a rock, his soul dwells at ease, secure in the skill, the power, and the affection of his governor, calm and unconcerned in all his pursuits: he commits the event of them to God, who perfectly knows what is best for him, and is both able and willing to do more than he can ask or think; the present bounties of providence he enjoys with a chearful content, without any anxious solicitude for the future. If things happen contrary to his wish or expectation, he supports himself with reflecting, that 'tis the appointment of infinite Wisdom and infinite Goodness, of one who sees that the success he desired would, in some respect or other, prove a greater disappointment to him. In the days of danger he is without fear, his heart standeth fast and will not shrink. Neither the rage of men, nor the malice of devils, are terrible to him. Tho' the kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against him; or tho' the madness of the people be gathered about him, yet

yet he knows that all these things are under the direction of his friend, whose power ruleth over all, and sets them their bounds which they cannot pass; who can in a moment either still the tempest, or divert it from him, and with his favourable kindness defend him as with a shield. Nay, even in the severest afflictions he is attended with reflections full of comfort: he knows that all the powers of earth or hell cannot distress him beyond the ability of God to deliver him; cannot exclude him from his presence, or hinder his recourse to him; that whatever he suffers comes upon him by his permission, who does not willingly grieve his creatures, but has wise and gracious ends in all his dispensations, tho' they may not presently appear to us; that it may be well for him that he is troubled, either for the exercise and improvement of his virtues, his patience and fortitude; or perhaps it may be the necessary means of deriving to him even some present advantage of greater value than it takes from him. In sum, he relies on his God, either to remove the burden, or to enable him to bear it, or to make him amends for what he endures under it.

But how different from this is his condition whose trust is in the creature; vexation and uneasiness attend him in every stage and event of life; his pursuits are disquieted with perpetual fear lest the fickle powers he relies on should deceive him, or some accident should disable them from serving him. Success, indeed, may give him a present flush of joy; but when the short transport is over, and he begins to consider the precarious tenure by which he holds  
his

his attainment, the apprehension of losing succeeds to the care of acquiring, and the same anxiety and solicitude that embittered the pursuit, disrelishes the fruition itself. But when danger becomes imminent, when the clouds are gathered around him, and are ready to burst upon his head, he then finds the vanity of his confidence; fearfulness and trembling come upon him, and his heart within him is like melting wax; distracted and irresolute in his counsels, and diffident of every recourse. But if the day of adversity actually overtakes him, he is then completely miserable; he flies from strength to strength, from one dependance to another, but he finds them all either weak or treacherous; the wealth, the honours in which he gloried, avail him nothing; and even the friend of his bosom, on whose fidelity and assistance he most relied, either proves false and forsakes him, or looks on with an useless pity, and cannot help him. In the beautiful image given us by the prophet, *He is like a man distressed with thirst in the parched places of the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.* He searches every pit, but finds no water, or such only as increases his torment; and if he cries for help, there is none can hear him; deserted and astonished he sinks into utter dejection, and even hope itself is swallowed up in despair. Lo this is the man that takes not God for his hope, but trusteth in the multitude of his riches, and strengthens himself in his ungodliness. Thus weakly provided is he even with regard to temporal happiness, thus foolish and miserable in comparison with



with him who trusts in God. But if we carry the reflection farther, and consider their different conditions with respect to another life, and the expectations of futurity, the worldling here gives up the argument, and pretends not to dispute the advantage of religion. All his schemes are terminated by the present scene of things; and if there be any thing beyond it, if an eternal state is to commence after this, he knows and confesses that he has made no provision for it, that he is lost and undone for ever: a prospect, which, tho' considered but as possible, is enough to cast a damp over his sprightliest hours, and embitter every pleasure. But if he ever attends to the arguments that persuade his belief of this great truth, (and sometimes, in spite of all his amusements, he will be forced to attend to them) with what horror and agonies must he reflect on the dreadful scene it opens to him!

Upon the whole then it appears from the comparison, that he who trusts in God has much the advantage, even with respect to present felicity; and when we take futurity into the account, he stands alone in his hope and pretensions, and is acknowledged to have no competitor; and it must be observed, that this glorious hope is itself the best ingredient, and the surest foundation even of his present happiness: from hence he derives content in his enjoyments, easiness in his expectations, and support and courage in calamity. He considers that his proper home and heritage is in another world, and therefore regards the events of this, with the indifference

difference of a guest that tarries but a day; in the mean time that peace of conscience, that confidence towards God which he enjoys, are a perpetual spring of pleasure to his soul. He triumphs over death itself, disarmed of its sting, and even longs to appear in the presence of that God in whom he has trusted, and through whose mercies in Christ he hopes to receive a blessed immortality.

I shall conclude with reminding you of one corollary arising to us from these reflections.

That since a confidence in God is the only sure foundation of our happiness present or future, and the uprightness of our heart and the obedience of our lives, is the only sure foundation of that confidence; the first care and concern of man must be to approve himself to God by righteousness, holiness, and purity; a firm perseverance in the duties which he has prescribed must be the ground-work in our scheme of happiness; and if this be truly laid, the superstructure will be strong and abide the trial. We shall be able to look up to God, with a firm Trust in his promises; a Trust, which will support us in all events of life; in our greatest troubles his comforts will refresh our souls: and when we pass through the vale of the shadow of death, the light of his countenance will be our consolation, and open a prospect to our faith into those regions of bliss and glory, where our labours and our fears shall cease, and sorrow shall be no more.

## S E R M O N    VII.

Of Glorifying in God alone.

By the Rev. Dr. LUCAS.

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PSALM xxxiv. 2.

*My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.*

**M**AN is too often more sensible of evil than good; and more apt to murmur and complain of the one, than to bless and praise God for the other; nay, what is worse, those good things which should inspire us with love and gratitude, and engage us to the service of God, have very often a quite contrary influence upon us: they render us more forgetful of God, and unthankful to him, they fasten our affections more strongly on the world, and instead of humility and dependance on God, produce in us pride and insolence, vain-glory and confidence in ourselves and fortunes. To prevent or cure this sin, this crying wickedness, this bold contradiction to all true notions of God and



and ourselves, of his providence, and our state, I have made choice of these words; from whence I might recommend to you a duty, than which nothing can better become us, in whatever capacity we be considered. What can better become us, who are the creatures of God, than to bless him, and depend on him? What can better become us, as Christians, than to be always praising and magnifying that God, to whose grace we owe our salvation and happiness? *It becometh well the just to be thankful.* If lastly, we consider ourselves as members of this church or state, God appears to have distinguished us by peculiar and signal mercies and blessings; and therefore we ought to distinguish ourselves too, by being peculiarly eminent for our gratitude and reliance on God; we, above all people, ought to put in practice the resolution of the psalmist, because we lie under more and greater obligations to it than any others: *My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.*

Boasting in the Lord is not one single one, but a kind of complication of virtues; 'tis love and gratitude to God, in opposition to forgetfulness and unthankfulness; 'tis humility towards him, in opposition to pride and self-conceit; 'tis acquiescence in, reliance and dependance upon him, in opposition to vanity and confidence in ourselves and fortunes. This is the duty which the text recommends, and which therefore I shall press upon you, by these four or five arguments.

1. The examples of excellent persons.
2. We have received all from God.

3. We are in such a state of dependance upon him, that we can reap little benefit, nay, we may suffer much prejudice by the most excellent endowments and possessions; unless they be sanctified by his grace, and befriended by his providence.

4. The boasting in any thing but in him, is a symptom of extreme prophaneness and irreligion; and therefore,

5thly. God is a profest enemy to all such proud and vain boasters. I'll begin with the first of these:

1. The examples, &c. This duty of boasting in God, and nothing else, is what the Scripture does frequently and earnestly inculcate, and extends to all those things, which mankind is wont to acquiesce, confide and glory in. Thus, Jer. ix. 23, 24. *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might: let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exerciseth loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* To this probably St. Paul refers, when putting the Corinthians in mind, out of what a mean, despicable, ignorant, sinful and wretched state, God had translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son, he concludes with this inference, that no flesh should glory in his presence. *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that according as it is*  
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written, *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*, 1 Cor. i. 29, 30, 31. And St. Paul himself was an eminent example of his own doctrine ; for when, to vindicate himself from that contempt which false apostles endeavoured to cast upon him, he found himself obliged to recount what he had done and suffered in the cause of Christianity, together with his endowments, graces and privileges, in all which he was not inferior to the chiefest of apostles ; he begs pardon for it, calls it the foolishness of boasting, and as nothing less could excuse it, he pleads necessity for it, *you have compelled me* : so strong a tincture of carnal vanity did boasting seem to have in it, the very appearance of which created, as it were, a blush and scruple in this humblest and greatest of the apostles ; and yet it did but seem so, for the true cause of this just and necessary commendation of himself, was not any worldly tenderness for his own reputation, but a jealousy for the honour of God, and the interest of souls ; he was afraid, lest his office might suffer in his person, and that contempt which was thrown upon the one, might hinder the success of the other ; this is clear from 2 Cor. xi. 20. But this apostle who was thus shy of glorying in his excellencies and advantages, lest he should seem too tender of his own honour, how forward is he to record his infirmities, that he might advance God's ? 2 Cor. xii. 9. *Most glad'y, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* He willingly lets us know that he was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, that at



the same time he might let us know the riches of Divine Mercy, in his pardon, and apostleship. He willingly confesses his proneness to be puffed up by knowledge and revelation ; his contention with the thorn in the flesh ; that he might from hence take an occasion to magnify the power of God's grace. He every where owns his weakness, he confesseth himself an earthen vessel, that the glory of all his conquests and achievements might redound to God, from whom he derived whatever strength or treasures he possessed.

To St. Paul I will join David ; for as the one was the most eminent servant of God under the New Testament, so was the other under the Old ; which ought to add great force and weight to their examples. I have considered the humility and gratitude of the one, in reference to spiritual things, and now I will set before you that of the other, in reference to temporal ones. The praise of God for some mercy, or blessing, or other, is the subject of almost every psalm ; one while he magnifies God for his goodness in general, and another while for that to himself in particular ; and sometimes he mixes both together ; as in this 34th psalm, ver. 4. he celebrates his own deliverance : *I sought the Lord, and he heard me ; yea, he delivered me out of all my fear.* Ver. 8, 9. he sets forth his goodness toward all that serve him. *O taste and see how gracious the Lord is ; blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye that are his saints ; for they that fear him lack nothing.* It were endless to pursue instances of this kind thro' the

Psalms ; I will content myself with one place, full enough for my purpose, 'tis psalm 44. in ver. 8. he has these words, *In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.* These words describe the influence of success and prosperity upon David, or rather they are the result of his reflections upon the glorious progress of Israel's arms, against the Canaanites : tracing all back to the first cause, and finding that the extraordinary issue of that war was not owing to the conduct of Moses, and Joshua, or to the number and courage of the armies of Israel ; but to the protection and favour of God, he easily from thence inferred, *That it was in him alone they ought at all times to confide ; that he is their strength and salvation ; and therefore ought to be their glory, and their joy, their praise, and their hope.* They got not the land in possession by their own sword, nor was it their own arm that helped them, but it was his right hand, and the might of thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. In all this therefore he could discern no temptation to pride and elation of mind, to confidence and security, to insolence and vanity, but plain and invincible reasons of humility and dependence upon God, of thanksgiving and praises to him ; and accordingly he resolves, *In God will we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.* Thus did the psalmist and the apostle serve God in all humility of mind ; and thus must we serve him too. We cannot be Christians, unless God be all in all to us, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end ; unless

we look upon him, as the source and spring of all good, the object of our joy and glory, and the ultimate end of our desires and hopes.

2. My next motive of boasting in God and him alone is this, That we have received all from him. 'Tis a great truth, *that every good gift comes down from above*; whether they be natural endowments, or worldly possessions, all is from God; all that we are born to, and all that we acquire, judgment, courage, wit, eloquence, wealth, power, favour, and the like; all these we certainly owe to God. As to the gifts of nature, none, unless atheistical, can doubt: and as to all others, of what sort soever, reason will easily teach us, that the sovereignty and dominion of God extends as far as his creation, and what his power produces, his wisdom and goodness must and does dispose of. We shall be much confirmed in this opinion, if we consider that those attainments, and acquisitions, which seem with the best colour to be attributed to ourselves, depend upon so many things which God has placed without our power, and reserved to his own, that we must be forced to confess that man's good success, even in these, is owing especially to the favour and concurrence of God. Thus, what is there that man can with better right ascribe to his study and experience, to application of mind and diligence, than learning and prudence? And yet it is so notorious, that these depend upon several capacities of nature, and various circumstances of fortune, and education, and these again upon God, that we cannot give the glory



of these to man, without being guilty of sacrilege towards God. Hence it is that after Solomon has commanded us to seek for wisdom, as silver, and search for her as hid treasure; he adds this as a motive and encouragement to it, *For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding*, Prov. ii. 6. So amicably do Divine Providence and human industry agree together. How natural does it seem to assign victory to courage and conduct; and yet he, who excludes Providence here, must be injurious to God, and partial to man. For not to examine how far courage and conduct are owing to God, he must be a very heedless reader of history, who has not remarked, that the event of war depends upon a thousand circumstances and casualties, entirely in the disposal of God; whence nothing is more common than that the wise and daring miscarry, while success waits upon men of a very different character. Not to multiply instances, that beloved wealth which is the incitement and reward of human art, skill and industry, is, after all, the largess of Divine bounty; wind and weather, the countenance and favour of man, with a thousand other accidents, are necessary to acquire it, and to preserve it; a wakeful Providence which must guard it against a thousand casualties, to which it is hourly liable. Hence now it is, that as the Scripture tells us, it is God who *giveth victory in battle*; so it tells us also, *it is God who giveth man power to get wealth*, Deut. viii. 18. What is now the inference

from all this? Even that of St. Paul, 1 Cor. iv. 7. *For who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?* It is arrogance and pride, to assume to ourselves, what we owe to the goodness of God: we ought to think and say of all we have, as Jacob did to Esau, of his children and flocks: *These are the children which the Lord hath graciously given me.* And again, *the Lord hath dealt graciously with me, and I have enough,* Gen. xxiii. 11. And if we derive all from God, acknowledgment and praise is the least sacrifice we can make him. As every good thing flows from his bounty, and every prosperous man is the creature of his favour, so should every thing speak and reflect his honour.

But may not a man, who is enriched above others with the gifts of heaven, value himself above the rest of mankind, who seem comparatively neglected and overlooked? Yes; for a man to look on himself as a favourite of God, is to acknowledge himself to eat the bread, to live and flourish by the bounty, and grace of God, his prince and sovereign; and to do this, is not to boast in himself, but in God. But if a man presume upon those excellencies which indeed he hath not, and boast the favours which he hath not received, this is arrogance and vanity. But if any man mistakes and perverts the designs of God's favours; if he employ his power and wealth, or any other gift, to support his luxury and insolence, like the evil steward  
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in the gospel, *who eat and drank with the drunken, and smote, and beat his fellow-servants*; this is indeed ingratitude with a vengeance; for it is to forget that he hath a Lord over him, to forget that his talents are trusts and gifts for which he stands accountable, and to look upon them so much his own, as if he had a right to waste and squander them at pleasure; which is boasting in himself and possessions, in the very worst of senses; which must bring upon him a thousand mischiefs in this and the world to come: a thought which reminds me of my third reason:

3dly, We depend so entirely upon God, that we can reap little benefit, nay, we may suffer much prejudice by the most excellent endowments and possessions, unless they be sanctified by his grace, and befriended by his providence. This is a natural consequence flowing from the former head: but if it need any further proof, there cannot be a clearer than an appeal to plain matter of fact: how true is that observation of Solomon, Eccles. ix. 11. *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race was not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all*: so weak and prosperous are the most admired perfections of man, when deserted or crossed by heaven. Gideon might have continued in the threshing-floor to old age, notwithstanding his martial disposition, had not the angel roused him with that gracious salutation, *The Lord is with thee, thou mighty*



*mighty man of valour.* David himself, though he had all in him that was necessary to make a great man, all that could please or profit mankind, all that could render him either revered or gracious, had probably been confined to his crook and sling, to his sheep and the wilderness, had not Providence marked out the way to his exaltation, had not God found him out an unexpected patron to introduce him into court, and make his prince acquainted with his incomparable qualities; *Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him,* 1 Sam. xvi. 18.

But this is not all; the richest gifts, if not befriended by Providence, and sanctified by grace, do not only smother away obscurely and ingloriously, but often prove fatal and destructive, both to their owners and others. How easily doth sagacity degenerate into fraud and subtilty? Wit into prophaneness and atheism? Courage into brutal fierceness and barbarity? How naturally do riches breed luxury? Power tyranny? Honour insolence? Favour and applause vanity? What were the fruits of Achitophel's profound politicks, and subtle counsels, when blasted by God, but an untimely and shameful death? What did the courage and magnanimity of Saul, when deserted of God; or, of Jonathan, when involved in the fate of his father, but procure them an honourable death on the mountains of Gilboa? When ambition and disloyalty had infected the duty and  
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piety of Absalom, those charms which made him popular, made him miserable too; the beauty of his person, and the enchantment of his tongue, the artfulness and insinuation of his address, did all but draw on his sin and ruin. Nay, the very spirit of prophecy did but hasten the ruin of Balaam, and enhance the guilt of Caiaphas, when covetousness had rooted itself in the one, and ambition in the other. And if these gifts prove injurious without the conjunction and patronage of grace and providence; how much more must those of an inferior and meaner nature? Thus the wise man observes of riches, not only what a vanity, but a vexation they prove, when either ambition or covetousness blasts, or obstructs the enjoyment of them, Eccles. v. 13. *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof, to their hurt*; this he remarks, concerning such who acted by a senseless ambition, resolved by any ways to raise themselves, and posterity; and then demonstrates the folly and wretchedness of such, in two or three instances: first, *All his days he eats in darkness*: that is, reservedness, anxiety, fullness, melancholy, and fear, are his inseparable companions in the dark and crooked paths of life; and he is a stranger to the candour, freedom, cheerfulness, and security of the honest and upright man. Secondly, *He hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness*; that is, when a calamity or disease overtakes him, his conscience rages and raves within him, and all the mean  
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and base actions of a miserable life, set themselves in array against him. Thirdly, *Those riches perish by evil travel*; that is, his ambition defeats its self, and the painful and toilsome wickedness, which first raised him to wealth and honour, doth in the end overwhelm him with shame and poverty; the judgments of God, and the revenge of man pursuing and hunting him down. Lastly, *He begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand*; this is the sum total of his grandeur, this is the issue of his ambitious projects. The wise man's reflections on that wealth, which the covetousness of the possessor, like worms in the manna, which was gathered only to be laid up, corrupts and depreciates, is not much milder, Eccles. vi. 1, 2. *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.* I will add but one instance more; power, as it is a more splendid and valuable gift than wealth, so is it obnoxious to greater evils. How often does that power, which ought to protect and guard mankind, and support human society, serve only to harass and destroy the one, and to disorder and dissolve the other? Power in the hand of the proud sinner, is like a sword in the hand of a fool or madman, pernicious to all, but most to himself, What an example have we of this in the favourite



vourite of a mighty prince ? I mean Haman. We find this man, Esther v. proudly displaying his plumes, recounting to his friends and dependants, the glory of his riches, and number of his children, the honour and preferments which his prince had heaped upon him, the particular grace the queen had shewed him ; and after all, this swelling and pompous harangue, shrank into that poor, pitiful, and miserable conclusion, *And yet all this profiteth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate.* Thus envy, like the worm that smote Jonah's gourd, blighted the freshness and verdure of all his glory. But alas ! this was but a petty mischief. This leaven never left working, till it had prevailed upon him to employ all his power and interest, not only to the destruction of Mordecai, this was too cheap a sacrifice to his pride, envy and revenge, but of the whole nation of the Jews ; and this drew on the black catastrophe of his fortunes ; for, to use the words of the psalmist, *In the net which he privately laid for another, was his own foot taken, and his mischievous devices light upon his own head.* From all this it abundantly appears why we should glory in God, not in any thing else ; since without his grace and providence, the most valuable gifts of nature, or fortune as we speak, are but useless and unprofitable trifles ; or what is much worse, splendid and glorious mischiefs. He that bestows his gifts, must bless them too, or else we shall reap little from them ; he must impregnate, influence, direct those capacities with  
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which he hath endowed us, or else they will soon be misemployed to his dishonour, and to our torment and ruin. Ah! what vain confidence then is that, which tempts us to forget or renounce our dependence upon him? What stupidity and folly is it that makes us glory in any worldly possession, or in ourselves? Alas! there is no strength or wisdom in our hands, not is there help, security, or pleasure in any creature without God. But this is not only a great folly, but a great sin too; which is my fourth reason.

Fourthly, To boast in any thing but God is a symptom of extreme prophaneness and irreligion; for whence can this proceed, but from an understanding darkened by ignorance or infidelity, or from a heart alienated from God, and possessed by some vile idol? For whatever man sets his heart upon, whatever he glories and confides in, this is his supreme good, this is his God. To refer the advantages and enjoyments of this life to any thing but God, to ascribe the issues and events of human actions and affairs, to any thing but him; to rest and glory in these temporal things, and in the survey of worldly grandeur and felicity; to enquire after no cause or origin of it at all; or to pursue our enquiries no further than the power or prudence, courage or industry of man; or what is worse, meer chance and fortune: what is this, but to exclude God out of the world? To deface the most natural and universal notion of a Deity; namely, That he is the author of all good; and consequently to leave no firm foundation,

dation, either for our love of him, or trust and hope in him. What absurdity, what ingratitude is this? God, by displaying his divine perfections in the works of creation, and by manifesting his love and goodness in those many benefits, which with a bountiful hand he hath conferred upon us, designs to engage us, by a thousand motives and obligations, to love and worship him; and we suffering our hearts to be engrossed by those beauties and excellencies, by those riches and pleasures which he created, do, by a strange sort of dissingenuity, make his goodness rob him of our affection; his power and glory, defraud him of our worship; his love and care for us, his gifts and presents to us, supplant his authority, and destroy his interest: for this is the plain case, when forgetting and denying him, we doat upon, and are elated and puffed up by his gifts and favours; we make his creatures his rivals, and his blessings and favours which should attract and engage, do alienate our hearts and affections from him. To boast then in any thing but God, is, in effect, to give the honour and affection due to God, to his creatures; to defeat the main design of his creation and providence, to cancel the strongest obligations to our invocation and worship of him, and as much as in us lies, to depose and dethrone him. And if boasting in any thing beside God, include in it all this wickedness and guilt, it is no wonder if God be a professed enemy to all such proud boasting; which is

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My fifth and last argument. The heathen thought that there was an envious dæmon, whose peculiar province it was to cast down the vain-glorious and insolent; but we Christians are taught, that to humble the proud, is a work *that God delights in*. God, saith St. James, *resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. The day of the Lord, saith the prophet Isaiah, ii. 12. shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, &c. and the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be made low. And wherefore doth God take pleasure in this? Far be envy from him, a passion incident only to the mean and miserable. No; 'tis to assert his sovereignty and dominion, to imprint an awe of his power upon the minds of mankind, and to extort from the proudest and vainest of mortals, a confession of their meanness and his majesty. Hence Isaiah, *And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.* And Daniel, *To the intent that the living may know, that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of the earth, and giveth them to whomsoever he will.* And Antiochus, 2 Mac. ix. when he was not able to bear his own stink, ended his pride and vanity in these wise and humble words: *It is meet to be subject to God, and that man that is mortal should not think of himself as if he were God.* To leave this argument the more deeply engraven in your hearts,*

hearts, I will lay before you three remarkable examples of God's indignation against proud boasting and self-confidence; namely, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, and Herod. Nebuchadnezzar was that tree in his vision; Dan. iv. 8, 9, 10, &c. *Whose height reached unto heaven, and its branches the ends of the earth; the leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.* But how soon did pride blast all his glory; and self-confidence provoke the exterminating decree? *Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches; shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beast get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches.* The poor creature, struck with horror by this menace, seems to awake out of his vain dream, and recover something of his lost sobriety and sense; and he seems to me to have followed, for a while, the advice of Daniel, for his prosperity was lengthened for a year; but at the year's end, so silly and unstable, ungrateful and faithless is every proud man, relapsing again into his former disease, he broke out into this proud boast, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, unto thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee, and they shall drive thee from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the*

*beasts of the field.* I cannot represent the arrogance and punishment of Antiochus, in a more emphatical manner, than the author of Maccabees has done it, 2 Mac. ix. He spoke proudly, and said, he would come to Jerusalem, and make it a common burying-place of the Jews; but the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, smote him with an incurable and invisible plague; for as soon as he had spoken these words, a pain of the bowels that was remediless, came upon him, and sore torments of the inner parts; howbeit, he nothing at all ceased from his bragging, but still was filled with pride, breathing out fire in his rage against the Jews. But it came to pass that he fell down from his chariot, carried violently, so that having a sore fall, all the members of his body were much pained; and thus he, that a little afore thought he might command the waves of the sea, (*so proud was he beyond the condition of man*) and weigh the high mountains in a balance, was now cast on the ground, and carried in a horse-litter, shewing forth unto all, the manifest power of God; so that the worms rose out of the body of this wicked man, and while he lived in sorrow and pain, his flesh fell away, and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to all his army; and the man that thought, a little before, he could reach the stars of heaven, no man could endure to carry, for his intolerable stink. I will conclude these instances with that of Herod, Acts xii. 21, 22, 23. *And upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them, and the people gave a shout, saying,*



*Saying, It is the voice of a God, and not of a man; and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.* Behold the vanity of man, the indignation and power of God! How easy is it for him to change the throne into a death-bed? Royal robes into worms? Flattery and acclamations into tears or scorn? And the pride and insolence of man, into poorness and dejection of spirit? Since God is wont to do so, or something like it, in proportion to the pride, and the station of man, we cannot but conclude, that modesty is man's wisdom, as well as duty; humility the security, as well as ornament of his fortune; and gratitude to God, the only effectual way to increase and prolong his felicity. Thus have I laid before you several considerations, serving to enforce the duty in my text, *i. e.* our boasting in God, and in him alone, and I doubt not but as I have convinced you of our obligation to this duty, so you will be ready to tell me, that you do in some measure comply with it; for this is one common way, by which the force of all practical discourses is wont to be eluded. To prevent this here, I will set down, by way of conclusion or application, two or three marks or characters, by which we may examine ourselves in reference to this matter.

1. If we have grateful hearts towards God, which is essential to the duty of my text, we shall let slip no occasion which invites us to praise and honour him; not only those things

that are new and surprizing, that are unusual or extraordinary, but also the common and ordinary works of God, and his constant and daily benefits, will affect our hearts with a devout and thankful remembrance of him. No instance of Providence, no accidents of life will pass us, without making some reflection upon it, tending to magnify the wisdom, power, or goodness of God. His works, his mercies, his favours, his glorious perfections will ever be in our hearts, and his praise will ever be in our mouths : business, diversion, labour, ease, success, disappointment, will not be able to hinder the one, nor any regard for the censure of man the other. All this I collect from the example of David, ver. 1. *I will always give thanks unto the Lord, his praise shall ever be in my mouth. In God we boast all the day long, and praise his name for ever.* Psal. cxix. 18. *When I awake, I am still with thee.* Psal. lxxvii. 11, 12. *I will remember the works of the Lord. Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also on all thy works, and talk of thy doings.*

2. If we truly glory in the Lord, and in nothing else, our admiration and reverence, our love and gratitude will discover themselves, not only in our words, but in our actions ; that holy disposition and frame of mind, which moves us to boast in God alone, will have an influence upon the whole course of our lives. The principle which causes us to be humble and thankful towards God, will keep us from being disrespectful and insolent towards man ; and in general,

general, we shall think it our duty not only to glorify God by praise and thanksgiving, but also, and that especially, by a right use and employment of his benefits and mercies. To reduce this to particulars : we boast not in ourselves, but in God, when we ascribe it to his providence, not to the counsels, courage, or conduct of man, when we treat vanquished or unfortunate enemies with all the modesty and moderation that becomes a just sense of the vicissitude and uncertainty of human affairs, and all the charity that becomes our Christianity ; that is, the utmost that can consist with the public honour and safety. We boast not in riches, but in God ; when as the apostle warns us, 1 Tim. vi. 17. *We are not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy* ; and when we so enjoy, as to be rich in good works too, and make our wealth the instrument of charity, not luxury. We boast not in power, but in God, when we always remember we are but men, and that he is God ; when we exert it not to subvert justice, but uphold it ; not to grieve, or oppress, but protect and relieve our neighbour. Finally, we boast not in our wisdom, but in God ; when we lean not to our own understanding, but on him ; when it does not puff us up, but increase the purity and integrity of our minds : when, lastly, it does not tempt us to insult the weakness, or prey upon the fortunes of a brother, but render us more serviceable to God and man.



3. The practice of this duty does by degrees advance us to a settled state of pleasure : I add, by degrees, to prevent any mistake about this matter. Love and gratitude are not presently raised to a heighth, nor does hope in God grow up to strength in a moment ; both which are necessary ingredients of the pleasure I speak of ; What can be more delightful than the exercise of love, when the object of it is most perfect ? What can be more agreeable than holy joy and praise, excited by a lively sense of Divine Favour ? What can be a truer or more lasting satisfaction, than communion with God, and a firm, though humble confidence in him ? The psalmist had undoubtedly an experimental knowledge of this truth ; may we all come to have such a one too, that we may be able to say feelingly with him, Psalm lxxiii 4, 5, 6. *Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee ; thus will I bless thee while I live ; I will lift up my hands in thy name, my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips ; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches,*

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## S E R M O N   V I I I .

### Of the Glory of G O D .

By the Rev. Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE.

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I COR. X. 31.

*Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.*

THE design of the apostle in this chapter, is to press upon Christians the great obligation they are under, to walk worthy of their holy vocation; to *walk worthy of God*, as he elsewhere expresses it, (1 Th. ii. 12.) to live as becometh the gospel of Christ; to behave themselves in such a manner, as may do honour to their religion, may give credit and reputation to their profession; in a word, that they be solicitous above all things to promote the Glory of God, and the salvation of men; to bring over unbelievers to the acknowledgment of the truth; and to prevent, as far as possible, those who do believe, from being in any manner of-

fended and discouraged in their duty, or by any means tempted and seduced into sin.

The great temptation in the apostles days, was that of relapsing into the heathen idolatry; either directly, into the gross acts of this sin, through fear of persecution; or consequentially, into the snare of a defiled conscience, by presumptuously misunderstanding the true bounds of what was lawful and innocent. Against both these St. Paul gives diligent caution in this chapter. Against falling into direct idolatry through fear of persecution, he exhorts the Corinthians by the following argument, ver. 13. *There has no temptation (says he) taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it: wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.* To strengthen which argument he proceeds in the next verses, to represent to them the greatness of the sin; by shewing them distinctly, under a plain and obvious similitude, what idolatry was, ver. 15. *I speak (saith he) as to wise men; judge ye what I say.* He does not insist merely upon his own authority, though it was no less than apostolical, as others, who have no such claim, are frequently too apt to do: he does not require of them to submit implicitly to what he says, without first considering whether it was right or no; but he exhorts them to make use of their own reason and understanding: *I speak (says he) as to wise (that is) to sensible and reasonable men; judge ye what I say; consider, if what*



I now propose to you, be not a reasonable and conclusive argument. *The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* That is, is it not a professing ourselves to be disciples of Christ? to be members of his body? ver. 16. *For we* (says he) *being many, are one bread and one body.* Ver. 17. In like manner, he speaks of Israel after the flesh, *Are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?* That is, is not this a declaring themselves to be disciples of Moses? ver. 18. By the same argument therefore, being *partakers*, saith he, *of the table of devils*, by eating of the sacrifices in the idol-temple, ver. 21. is, in reality, to communicate in the guilt of the heathen idolatry.

Against the next danger, viz. that of falling consequentially into the snare of a defiled conscience, by presumptuously misunderstanding the true bounds of what was lawful and innocent; against this he cautions them in the remaining part of the chapter. An idol, every well-instructed Christian knew to be nothing in the world: as to meats therefore offered in sacrifice to idols, the good creatures of God could not be defiled by the imaginary superstitions of vain men. And therefore Christians, provided they themselves bore no part in the heathen worship, were not obliged to make any inquiry, whether meats sold in the markets, or set before them at any friend's house, had by others been dedicated to superstitious use, ver. 25, 27. Nevertheless, though as to those who had this understanding, the matter was clear; yet if any scrupulous and weaker brother was dissatisfied

as to the lawfulness of this practice, in such case they were bound to abstain. Bound, not by any obligation upon their own conscience, but out of tenderness and regard to his, ver. 28, 29. lest by their needlessly doing what was innocent to themselves, he should be encouraged to do the same thing which was not innocent to him. In which case it was much more material, and of greater importance to the honour of religion, that they should avoid offending his conscience, than that they should unseasonably assert their own liberty. Ver. 23. *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.* The meaning is, All things that are lawful for a man to do, 'tis not consequently for the interest of religion that he should do them, if it so happens that other mens consciences be not therein satisfied as well as his own. For that is most for the true interest of religion, which tends most towards making all men act with a good conscience. Ver. 24. *Let no man therefore seek his own, but every man another's wealth.* That is, be not so much solicitous to keep up the full extent of your own innocent liberty, as to do that which will more generally and effectually prevent men's falling into sin. This ought always to be the main end, the great and prevailing consideration, in every action of a good Christian; what will most tend to promote the kingdom of God, the practice of universal righteousness and truth amongst men. In order to this end, it is not indeed lawful to do any thing that is evil, but it is at any time very com-

commendable to forbear doing what is innocent. This end, all our great and religious actions ought always actually and directly to aim at; and all our smaller and indifferent actions, ought, by a general and habitual intention, to have the same tendency. For so the apostle concludes his whole discourse, in the words of the text; *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God: give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*

The words of the text contain a doctrine of the highest importance in religion; and therefore, in the following discourse upon them, I shall more largely and distinctly consider, 1st, What is the true meaning, and full intent of that phrase which we so often meet with in Scripture, *The Glory of God*: and 2dly, What it is that is required of men in practice, in order to their satisfying the precept in the text, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.*

I. As to the true meaning of that phrase which we so often meet with in Scripture, *The Glory of God*: 'tis to be observed that the

1st and original signification of it, is to denote to us the essence, the person, or the majesty of God; that is, God himself, who is the fountain of Glory. Thus, 2 Pet. i. 17. *There came to him (to our Saviour at his baptism) such a voice from the Excellent Glory: from the Excellent Glory; that*



that is, from God, his Father; as 'tis literally expressed in the very same verse. In this sense, the *name of God*, the *Majesty on high*, and some other such phrases, are also used, in the like manner, to signify God himself. And, *sitting on the right hand of power*, Matt. xxvi. 64. is, sitting at the right hand of God, who alone has properly all power.

2dly, This phrase, *the Glory of God*, signifies in the next place, the manifestation of God's perfections or attributes, by the external exercise of them towards his creatures. God was essentially happy before any thing was created, in the enjoyment of his own unspeakable perfections: but the manifestation of the glory of those perfections, and the communication of good to others, could not be till the creation of things. Hence the prophet Isaiah represents God thus speaking, (ch. xliii. 7.) *I have created him for my Glory, I have formed him, yea I have made him.* In allusion to which expression it may probably be supposed to be, that St. Paul says, 1 Cor. xi. 7. that *Man is the image and Glory of God.*

And because in every one of the Divine Perfections in particular, when manifested singly in their proper and respective acts, there is something distinctly worthy of adoration and praise; 'tis therefore not unfrequent in Scripture, to express any one of those perfections singly, by the title of the *Glory of God*. Thus concerning the Divine Power, Ps. xix. 1. *The heavens declare the Glory of God*, (that is, they show forth unto men the power of God in creating, and his wisdom

dom in disposing things;) and the firmament sheweth his handy work. And John xi. 4, 40. *This sickness of Lazarus (saith our Lord) is not unto death, but for the Glory of God,—that thou shouldst see the Glory of God,—and that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.* The meaning is, It was intended for a manifestation of God's power to raise the dead, and of his having communicated that power also to the Son of Man. And here we may observe, by the way, that the tyranny indeed of weak and vain mortals, is apt to take pleasure in power for power's sake; and their great complacency and glory is, in being able to exercise it arbitrarily and without reason. But God, whose power is truly infinite, makes it his glory to exercise power only in doing good; (for almost all our Saviour's miracles were acts of beneficence, as well as of power) or at least, if the subject is not capable of good, yet the exercise of his power, even in acts of severity, is according to justice always. Rom. ix. 22. *What if God, willing,—to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction!* He did not shew his absolute power, in fitting a certain number of men to destruction; as some have absurdly understood this text, directly contrary to the words themselves; but he shewed his power in justly punishing those, who after much long-suffering and forbearance with them, appeared finally fit for nothing but destruction.

Again: Because mercy and goodness are represented in Scripture, as the attributes wherein  
God

God chiefly delights, according to that of St. James, ch. ii. 13. *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment* ; or as it is in the original, *Mercy glorieth over judgment* : therefore this also is, in a particular and emphatical manner, called the *Glory of God*. Rom. ix. 23; *That he might make known the riches of his Glory on the vessels of mercy* : And Ephes. iii. 16 ; *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his Glory, to be strengthened—by his spirit in the inner man*.

In pursuance of which same manner of speaking, grace or mercy is by the evangelist called likewise the *Glory of Christ*. John i. 14. *We beheld his Glory, the Glory as of the only-begotten of the Father full of grace* (that is, of mercy) *and truth*. And even of a man, Prov. xix. 11. *It is his Glory* (saith Solomon) *to pass over a transgression*. And the thanks, which men are bound to return to God for his free goodness and compassion towards them, is expressed to be accordingly to the praise of his *Glory* ; Ephes. i. 14. *The redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of his Glory*. In this particular sense is sometimes meant that general observation, that the end to which God directs all his actions, is his own *Glory*, Rom. xi. 32.\* *God hath concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all*.

Thus God's manifesting the several attributes and perfections of his Divine Nature, in the external exercise of them towards his creatures,

\* And Gal. iii. 22.



is frequently what the Scripture means by the Glory of God.

3dly, From hence, on the other side, the return or acknowledgment, which creatures make again to God, for his manifestations of his goodness to them, is likewise in Scripture stiled *The Glory of God*, or *Their giving Glory to him*. To give Glory to God, is to promote his honour in the world ; or to contribute what we can towards keeping up in all men's minds, a just sense of him, and regard towards him.

And this is done, particularly, by worshipping him, with constant and perpetually-returning acts, of solemn public devotion. Ps. xxix. 1. *Give unto the Lord Glory and strength ; give unto the Lord the Glory due unto his name ; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.* Thus the saints in heaven (Rev. iv. 11.) are represented as worshipping God, and saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory, and honour, and power ; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.* And the nations of the earth are directed accordingly, (ch. xix. 7.) *Fear God, and give Glory to him, and worship him that made heaven and earth.* Which worship, because the Heathen world gave to others instead of the true God, even to Gods which did not make the heaven and the earth as the prophet describes || them ; therefore St. Paul thus charges them, Rom. i. 21. that *when they knew God, yet they glorified him not as God.*

|| Jer. x. 11.

Again :

Again : By thanks particularly returned for special mercies or benefits received, by which we profess our sense of God's being the author of those benefits ; is the honour of God promoted among men, or Glory given unto him. Thus (Luke xvii. 18.) when of the ten lepers that were healed, one only, who was a Samaritan, was truly thankful for the mercy shewn him ; *There are not found* (says our Saviour) *that returned to give Glory to God, save this stranger.*

Further: Glory is in like manner said to be given to God, by acknowledgment of his government and supreme dominion in the world: Phil. ii. 11. *That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the Glory of God the Father ;* that is, to the honour of God, who exalted him, and who gave him a name which is above every name, by setting him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. Thus also, Rev. xi. 13. when great judgments of God fell upon the idolatrous world, *the remnant* (says the text) *were affrighted, and gave Glory to the God of heaven ;* that is, they then acknowledged the true God to be indeed Supreme Governor of the world. For not acknowledging of which, but proudly assuming to himself the cause of his own grandeur and riches, king Belshazzar is thus reproved by Daniel, (ch. v. 22.) *Thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, but hast lifted up thy self against the Lord of heaven ; and—the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.* And king Herod, when, being arrayed in royal  
apparel,

*apparel, he sat upon his throne; immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, Acts xii. 23. because he gave not God the Glory; that is, because forgetting his dependance upon God, he suffered the people to applaud him as being himself a God, and the author of his own greatness.*

Upon the same ground, confession of past sins with true humiliation, and a just sense of the unworthiness and ungratefulness of sin; is in Scripture styled *giving Glory to God.* Josh. vii. 19. *Joshua said to Achan, who had stolen some of the accursed things, and endeavoured to dissemble it, My son, give, I pray thee, Glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him: that is, acknowledge, that nothing can be concealed from his all-seeing eye; and that to him there is no secret nor shadow of darkness, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

Actual repentance, and forsaking of sin, by real amendment, is still in a higher degree giving Glory to God, or promoting his honour, Rev. xvi. 9. *Men blasphemed the name of God, who hath power over these plagues; and they repented not, to give him Glory.*

Habitual holiness, or a constant established practice of virtue, in the course of our lives, is yet further, in the highest degree we are capable, giving Glory to the God of all righteousness and holiness, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. 1 Cor. vi. 20. *Glorify God in your body and in your spirit: being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the Glory and praise of God.* Phil. i. 11.



In a word: whatever tends to the true honour of religion, to the promoting and establishment of virtue and goodness among men; \* *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, these are the things which promote the Glory of God.* God is himself a being of infinite holiness and goodness; a perfectly just and righteous, as well as Supreme Governor of the universe: and the Glory of such a Governor, is the establishment of his moral kingdom, the universal establishment of the dominion and power of virtue, in the wills of all reasonable and intelligent creatures. His natural kingdom is by necessity; for the material world cannot but obey him: but his moral kingdom, which is his greatest glory, is the dominion of righteousness and virtue. Hence the apostles, in their exhortations to the practice of any virtue whatsoever, frequently urge this argument, that it will be *to the Glory of God.* (Rom. xv. 5.) *God—grant you to be like-minded one towards another,—that ye may with one mind glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And in the words of the text, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.* Do every thing, even the most common actions of life, in such a manner, as may become the professors of the gospel of Christ, and may promote the honour

\* Phil. iv. 8.

and interest of religion. The words are of the same import, with those in Col. iii. 17. *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*; do every thing so as becomes the disciples of Christ, *giving thanks to God, even the Father, by him; that God in all things may be glorified, through Jesus Christ*, 1 Pet. iv. 11; or, as 'tis expressed, Tit. ii. 10. *that ye may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*. To adorn the doctrine of God, is, by your practice, to cause it to appear lovely and beneficial to mankind, to shew how glorious 'tis in its effects, and how worthy to be embraced and practised by all men. This is what the Scripture elsewhere calls, *glorifying the word of the Lord*, Acts xiii. 48; *glorifying it, and causing it to have its free course*; so St. Paul explains it, 2 Th. iii. 1. 'Tis promoting the interest of religion and virtue, and the general salvation of men; 'tis spreading the knowledge of God, and bringing men over to the obedience of his commands, in order to their becoming capable of being partakers of his happiness. Which happiness and perfection of rational creatures, being the great end and design of God's creation, and what both nature and Scripture calls the *kingdom of God*, therefore, whatever tends to the promoting of virtue and true religion in the world, is promoting the honour and the Glory of God. When many of the Jews, convinced by our Saviour's miracles, embraced the truth of his doctrine; the Scripture thus expresses it, Mat. xv. 31. *that they glorified the God of Israel*.

When our Saviour promises his disciples, for the further confirmation and establishment of their faith, that God would certainly grant them the petitions they should rightly put up in his name; he does it in the following manner, *that the Father* (says he) *may be glorified in the Son*, John xiv. 13. In the 21st chapter of the same gospel, ver. 19; because the testimony and the sufferings of the martyrs, are one of the principal means of propagating the true religion, therefore our Saviour's foretelling in what manner St. Peter should die, is by the evangelist thus expressed, that *our Lord signified by what death Peter should glorify God*. For the same reason, the spreading of the knowledge of the true God, among the nations of the world, is by the prophet called, *setting his Glory among the heathen*, Ezek. xxxix. 21. And because nothing does this more effectually, than the virtuous lives, and good examples of those who profess the truth; therefore the apostle tells the Corinthians, (2 Cor. iv. 15.) that *the abundant grace which was in them, did, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the Glory of God*. And our Saviour, exhorting his disciples to be bright examples of virtue to the world, does it in this manner, (Mat. v. 16.) *Let your light* (says he) *so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*.

All that has been said upon this head concerning the Glory of God, is still further confirmed by the consideration of the contrary,  
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what is meant by the dishonour of God. Literally and strictly speaking 'tis evident God cannot be dishonoured, because his essential honour or glory is immutable. But as the promoting of virtue and righteousness is glorifying God, so the bringing any reproach upon religion and goodness, is dishonouring of God, who is the author of true religion, and the fountain of goodness. Thus, under the Old Testament, the wickedness of Eli's sons, (1 Sam. ii. 17.) caused *men to abhor the offering of the Lord*. And the sin of David (2 Sam. xii. 14.) gave *great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*. Upon this ground Nehemiah thus exhorts the Jews at their return from the captivity, (ch. v. 9.) *Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?* And God complains by the prophet Isaiah, (ch. lii. 5.) *They that rule over my people, oppress them, saith the Lord, and my name continually every day is blasphemed*. And again, by Ezekiel, (ch. xxxvi. 20.) *When they entered unto the heathen whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said, These are the people of the Lord*.

In the New Testament the same argument is urged by St. Paul, Rom. ii. 23. *Through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles, through you, as it is written*. And in his particular directions to persons in particular stations, his exhortation to young women is, that by sober conversation they *give none oc-*

*casion to the adversary to speak reproachfully, 1 Tim. v. 14: and that they be chaste and discreet, that the word of God be not blasphemed: Tit. ii. 5. And to young men, ver. 8. that by their uncorruptness, gravity, and sincerity, — be that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of them. And to servants, that they behave themselves well towards their masters, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed, (1 Tim. vi. 1.)*

Thus have I briefly explained what is in Scripture meant by this phrase, *The Glory of God*, and our giving Glory to him. 'Tis promoting the interest of true virtue and righteousness in the world. For as the natural kingdom of God over the inanimate creation, consists in his exercise of power and wisdom; so the spiritual kingdom of God over the rational world, consists in the obedience of the wills of reasonable creatures, to the moral and eternal laws of righteousness. And the Glory of God, as of every good governor in proportion, is the goodness and happiness of his subjects. When therefore we say that God does every thing for his own glory, and that this is his ultimate end; the meaning is, that his design in all things is the final establishment of his kingdom of universal righteousness in the whole creation. And accordingly, when a man does any action because it is good and right, or forbears it because it is evil and immoral; then only, and not when he acts upon any enthusiastic principles, does he truly intend the Glory of God.

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This in general. I should now have proceeded in the second place, to shew more particularly, what it is that is required of men in practice, in order to their satisfying the precept in the text, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.* But this hereafter.



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## S E R M O N IX.

Of the Glory of God.

By Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE.

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I COR. X. 31.

*Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.*

**I**N discoursing upon these words, I have proposed to consider, 1<sup>st</sup>, what is the true meaning, and full intent of that phrase which we so often meet with in Scripture, *The Glory of God*: and 2<sup>dly</sup>, what it is, that is required of men in practice, in order to their satisfying the precept in the text.

I. As to this phrase, which we so often meet withal in Scripture, *The Glory of God*; I have shewn, that it denotes, in its first and original signification, the essence, the person, or the majesty of God, that is, God himself, who is the fountain of Glory. 2<sup>dly</sup>, It signifies the manifestation of God's perfections or attributes in the  
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external exercise of them towards his creatures. And from hence, 3dly, on the other side, the return or acknowledgment, which creatures make again to God, for his manifestations of his goodness to them, is likewise in Scripture stiled, *The Glory of God*, or their giving Glory to him.

Thus far I have already proceeded in general. That which now remains, is,

II. To consider distinctly and particularly, in the several cases and circumstances of life, what it is that is required of men in practice, in order to their satisfying the precept in the text; *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.*

And 1st, He who will in all things promote the Glory of God, must in the first place shew forth the sense he has of God upon his mind, by acts immediately and directly religious; by such acts as are professed acknowledgments of our own dependance upon God, and exemplary to provoke other men, (as the apostle elegantly expresses it, Heb. x. 24.) *unto love and to good works.* Of this kind are public prayer and thanksgiving: Ps. cvii. 31. *O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doth for the children of men! That they would exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the seat of the elders!* By this public worship of God, are made the properest expressions of the sense we have of our dependance upon him; and by this manner of expressing it, is that sense itself, the sense of God and of religion upon the minds of men, most effectually kept up and preserved. Very  
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emphatical is the description St. John gives us, of the whole universe joining, in their several capacities, to give Glory in this manner to their common Lord: Rev. v. 13. *Every creature, which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne.*

2dly, He who, according to the direction in the text, will do all things to the Glory of God; as he must be constant in acts immediately and directly religious, so he must resolve against being at any time guilty of any action which is directly irreligious. Of this kind is every deliberate sin, every act which is against a man's own conscience, every known transgression of a commandment. Which things, whosoever is at any time guilty of; far from doing all to the Glory of God, he, on the contrary, as much as in him lies, dishonours and reproaches him. For wilful sin, sinning *presumptuously*, or *with a high hand*, (as the Scripture expresses it) is in the nature of things a dishonour to God: Rom. ii. 23. *Thou that makest thy boast of the law, thro' breaking the law dishonourest thou God?* 'Tis reproaching the Lord, or contending in effect, that his commandments are not wise, just, and good: Num. xv. 30. *The soul that doth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.* 'Tis casting contempt upon his laws; H. v. 24. *They have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*



*Israel.* 'Tis defying his power; 1 Cor. x. 22. *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* In a word; 'tis professing that we know better what is right and fit for us ourselves, than he can judge for us; and therefore that we will not have him to reign over us. This is the case of presumptuous sins; of all actions, known to be directly and in their own nature irreligious.

But not only by actions intrinsically and in their own nature immoral, is God dishonoured; but also by every thing, which in its circumstances is evil; by every act, which either the person who commits it, judges to be unlawful; or which needlessly gives offence to others, and becomes to them the cause or the occasion of sin. For, the kingdom of God consisting in the prevalency of universal righteousness, sincerity, and truth; it follows, that not only by the practice of whatever is intrinsically immoral, but also by whatever wounds and defiles the conscience either of him who does the action, or of others who by the example of it are led into the commission of what to them is sin; by every such thing is God's kingdom of righteousness diminished, and the dominion of virtue over the hearts and wills of men, (which is the Glory and the delight of God) is weakened and impaired. For whoever does any thing with a sense or judgment in his own mind, of its being unlawful when he does it, however otherwise the act might possibly have been innocent in its own nature; yet he sins at that time against his  
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own conscience, and consequently against God. And whoever does any thing with a probable knowledge or expectation, that his doing it will be a means of deceiving or tempting his neighbour into sin, however otherwise the action might have been not only innocent in itself, but innocent also to him, because he knew it to be so; yet in this case, by uncharitableness, he sins against his brother, and consequently against God. For, since the promoting of virtue and goodness in the world, is the most important of all things; it becomes us at all times, and in all our actions, to look upon it as our main end. And though the perverseness of malicious persons, who are apt to misrepresent things, is by no means an obligation upon any good man to forbear doing any thing that he himself knows to be innocent; yet the weakness of sincere and well-meaning persons, who by relying upon his example might be led to do what would in them be sin, is a very strong reason, (unless he has otherwise some great occasion or necessity of acting) it is (I say) in point of charity a very strong reason, why he should forbear doing that which would be so hurtful to them. Where the thing that gives offence to others, and either drives or leads them into sin, is such as not only upon account of this circumstance or consequence, but intrinsically also and in its own nature is unlawful; there the Scripture denounces against the offender the utmost severity of woe, as against a presumptuous dishonourer of God. Matt. xviii. 6. *Who so shall offend one of these*

*these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea : woe unto the world, because of offences ; for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.* But where the thing done is innocent in itself, and only by accidental consequence proves an occasion of sin to others ; yet even there, he who foresees this consequence, and takes not care to prevent it, is in Scripture charged with uncharitableness towards the soul of his brother, if it be a fellow-Christian whom he so causes to offend ; or with want of true concern for the Glory of God, if the offence be given to an unbeliever.

As to the case of unbelievers, the apostles thus exhort, 1 Pet. ii. 12. *Have your conversation honest among the Gentiles : that---they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.* Again, 2 Cor. viii. 21. *Provide for honest things, (that is things of good reputation as well as lawful) not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. Abstain from all appearance of evil,* 1 Th. v. 22. *Provide things honest, (that is, reputable) in the sight of all men,* Rom. xii. 17. *Walk honestly towards them that are without,* 1 Th. iv. 12. *Honestly, that is, wisely, circumspectly, so as to afford them no objection against your religion.* Thus the same apostle explains himself, Col. iv. 5. *Walk in wisdom towards them that are without.*

As to the case of fellow-Christians, how the Glory of God is to be promoted, by our behaviour



viour towards them; by our taking care to avoid even such innocent things, as we see likely to lead any of them into sin, and may be forgiven without any great inconvenience to ourselves; the apostle explains himself at large, by putting a particular and very remarkable instance, in the chapter whereof my text is a part, and in the eighth chapter of this epistle; and in the fourteenth chapter to the Romans.

The case he puts is, whether it was lawful for Christians to eat of such meats, as the Heathen had sacrificed to their idols. In the present chapter, whereof my text is a part, he thus resolves the question, ver. 25, 27. *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, or set before you at a friend's house, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake; i. e.* Care not, whether the heathens have superstitiously offered it to their idols, or not; *for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*, ver. 26. The meaning is, God made all things, and every creature of his is good, if it be received with thanksgiving; nor can any man's folly and superstition make that to be unclean, which God has made clean to us. *But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols*, ver. 28. *then eat not, for his sake that shewed it*; that is, forbear then, out of charity to him, lest your liberty cause him to strain his conscience, and so fall into sin. And then he sums up all in the words of the text, *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God: give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.*

In the eighth chapter of this epistle, he again proposes and resolves the same question : ver. 4. *As concerning the eating things offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. Howbeit, saith he, ver. 7. there is not in every man that knowledge : for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an idol ; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* Wherefore, though in reality, and to a man of understanding, the good creatures of God are not at all the worse, for having by other mens vain and senseless superstition been offered to an idol ; yet take heed, says the apostle, ver. 9. *lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak : for if any man see thee which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idols temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak, be emboldened, (in the original it is expressed very emphatically, shall he not be edified) to eat those things which are offered to idols ? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died.* And then he concludes, ver. 12. *When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ : wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*

Lastly, The same question he again determines, in the fourteenth chapter to the Romans : *I know, saith he, ver. 14. and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself ;*

*itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean: but if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now thou walkest not charitably.——All things indeed are pure, but 'tis evil for that man who eateth with offence: it is good therefore, neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is made weak: Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God.* His meaning, in these last words, is; not, (as some have wickedly perverted the words) that provided a man has right notions of religion himself, he need not openly own and profess them before others: but his meaning is, that in things of an indifferent nature, (of which only he was here speaking) men of understanding had better keep to themselves their lawful liberty, than run the hazard of encouraging others to venture further than their consciences will innocently permit them. *Hast thou faith?* i. e. hast thou assurance of the innocency of what thou dost? *have it to thyself before God.*

The sum is this: to do any evil action, that good may come of it, is not lawful: but to forbear any innocent action, when such forbearance is the likeliest means to prevent another man's falling into sin, is both lawful and commendable. Nay, the acting otherwise, is, in such case, uncharitableness towards our brother: Rom. xiv. 15. *If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.*

To apply this to other cases. We affirm, and with great reason, that such use of images  
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in religious worship, as the church of Rome joins, is direct idolatry. But suppose it were not, yet, so long as the generality of the people cannot possibly pray otherwise amongst them, than *with conscience of the idol*, as St. Paul expresses himself, 1 Cor. viii. 7. 'twould be the greatest injustice in the world, for them to cause their brethren to perish, for whom Christ died; by imposing upon them needlessly, and without warrant of Scripture, so manifest a stumbling-block, and so evident a cause of falling into sin. And the like may be said in proportion, concerning the violent and obstinate imposition of any dubious doctrine, or any dangerous ceremony, beyond the original plainness and simplicity of the gospel. 'Tis chusing to hazard the salvation of men, and to cause divisions, and strifes, and unnecessary difficulties of conscience among the servants of Christ, for the sake of pride and vanity, and love of dominion over men. Whoever is sincerely desirous to *do all things to the Glory of God*; as he will be heartily sorry for all his own sins and offences, so he will really endeavour, as much as in him lies, to prevent the sins of others; he will avoid every thing that may lead them into sin; he will set them an example of virtue, in the practice of his own life; he will recommend to them in his discourse, upon all fair and proper occasions, the excellency and the reasonableness of religion; he will rejoice and be truly pleased to see virtue, righteousness, and universal charity, and good-will, prevail and prosper in the world; he will lead no man into error, nor be

easy to see any man continue in it; but will wish with Moses, that all the Lord's people were prophets; and contribute, as much as in him lies, towards enabling them to be so. And, if he be in power or authority, he will desire not to grieve or burden the consciences of men, but will esteem it of much more importance to unite Christians in the plain simplicity of the gospel, and in the bonds of righteousness and true charity, than to establish for himself any power or dominion over the consciences of his brethren, either by presumptuously claiming to himself a false spiritual authority which Christ has not given him, or antichristianly and atheistically making use of temporal power, to compel or awe men in matters of religion.

Thus have I briefly explained the two primary and great instances, wherein consists a man's *doing all things to the Glory of God*. It implies first, that he regularly shows forth the sense he has of God upon his mind, by acts immediately and directly religious; and 2dly, that he resolves against being at any time guilty of any action, which is directly irreligious. But further,

3dly, In all great actions, actions of moment and consequence in the main course of a man's life; although they be not such, as have any direct relation to religion, yet ought he expressly to intend the Glory of God, as his chief and main end. He ought to intend the Glory of God; that is, the promoting of truth and right, of justice and goodness in the world. For  
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whatever is therefore chosen, because it tends to the promoting of virtue and goodness, is (in the Scripture-sense) done *for the Glory of God*: And whatever is for that reason avoided, because it has, in any manner, a tendency to evil, is avoided *for the Glory of God*. Now there is no considerable action in any man's life, no action of consequence and importance in the world, but which, even though it has not any direct relation to religion, yet some way or other has in the whole a tendency, to promote the cause either of virtue or of vice. Such is, for instance, a man's chusing his profession, employment, or manner of life in the world. Whatever profession, though not in itself direct unlawful, yet leads men needlessly into many and strong temptations to sin, will always, if possible, and if he is not under any pressing necessity, be avoided by any man who is sincerely desirous to do all things to the Glory of God. Every innocent profession may equally and indifferently be chosen by any good man; but yet, even in that choice, his main and ultimate end will be the exercise of right and truth, and the mutual comfortable support of men, in justice, faithfulness, and charity. Profit, power, credit, reputation, and the like, may very innocently, and very justly be aimed at, by men in any business or employment whatsoever: but these things must always be desired, with a due subordination to the interest of virtue; which is the Glory of God, and the only true and final happiness of men. Whoever, in the great lines



and main course of his life, aims meerly or principally at worldly and temporal ends; in the attainment of those ends he has his reward.

4thly and lastly; as in all great actions a good Christian ought actually, so in all even the smallest and most inconsiderable actions of life, he ought habitually to intend the Glory of God. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.* The Scripture represents all, even irrational and the very inanimate creatures, (Ps. cxlviii. 2, &c.) *Beasts and all cattle, worms and feathered fowls; the sun, the moon, and stars; mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars; fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storms;* the Scripture, I say, represents even all these as glorifying God, because they act regularly, according to the nature he has given them, and by his command. Much more then, may even the most common actions of men, be justly said to be done to the Glory of God, when they are done decently and soberly, regularly and innocently; as becomes men and Christians, and such as have upon their minds, even when they are not directly thinking of it, an habitual regard to God and religion. In a journey; to a diligent man, and one whose mind is really bent upon his journey's end, every thing he does, as well as actual travelling, tends truly to the same end. His rest and sleep, his stops and refreshments, nay even his very diversions and digressions, still tend uniformly, towards enabling him to arrive at his intended home. And thus likewise in the course of a religious life; to a man truly and sincerely

sincerely virtuous; every action of his life promotes the honour of religion, which is the Glory of God; and every thing he does is sanctified by a habit of virtue: his worldly business and employment, by justice and charity running uniformly through all the parts of it; the common actions of his life, by decency and inoffensiveness; his very pleasures and diversions, by innocency and right intention. In a word; whatsoever he is doing, he still always habitually remembers the end, and therefore he *never does amiss*, Ecclus. vii. 36.

III. The uses, which may be drawn by way of inference from what has been said are:

1st, From hence we may learn how severe a reproof those persons justly deserve, who, far from doing all things, as the apostle directs, *to the Glory of God*, do on the contrary, by prophaneness, unrighteousness and debauchery, directly dishonour him whom they profess to serve; bringing a reproach and infamy upon our most holy religion, and causing the name of God and the doctrine of Christ to be through their means blasphemed among unbelievers.

2dly, Those deserve in the next place to be rebuked sharply, who, though they do not dishonour God by acts directly irreligious, yet are careless and negligent in matters of religion; not much regarding whether truth or error prevails in the world; nor being solicitous to do honour to their religion, and to promote the spreading of the doctrine of Christ, by shewing the reasonableness of it, by preserving the simplicity

and purity of it, and by exhibiting the beauty of it to all mankind.

3dly, After these, are be reprov'd such as have indeed a zeal for religion, but not according to knowledge, placing the main stress of religion in forms and ceremonies unworthy of God ; or in opinions and notions, which either through their obscurity and unintelligibleness, or by their disagreeableness to the everlasting gospel, to natural religion and to the Divine Perfections, hinder, instead of promoting, the Glory of God.

4thly, Even the best of men have need to be admonish'd, and to be *put in remembrance, that they stir up the gift of God that is in them,* 2 Tim. i. 6. That they purge themselves continually from every evil work, *that they may bring forth more fruit,* John xv. 2. that they be *more and more diligent* in all their actions, to do every thing to the Glory of God : not with a superstitious anxiety, or burdensome preciseness, in things of little moment ; but with a cheerful application of every thing that occurs in life, to the promoting of truth and right, of reason and virtue among men. Rejoicing in the Glory of God, and in the establishment of his kingdom of righteousness ; as that wherein consists the happiness of the whole creation, both in this world, and in that which is to come.

Lastly, From hence we may learn to comfort and satisfy the minds of some weak Christians ; who, not having a right notion what the



Glory of God is, can never assure themselves that they are true promoters of it. They read that Moses prayed to God to blot him out of his book, if thereby the children of Israel might be saved; and that St. Paul even wished himself accursed from Christ, if thereby the nation of the Jews could be converted. And hence some have put the question to themselves, and others have been so weak as to put it in their writings, whether a Christian ought to be content to perish finally for the Glory of God. The question is absurd and contradictory; and has no foundation in the texts referred to. Moses, and St. Paul, in the circumstances they were then in, might charitably, and without any extravagancy, be willing to have borne the temporal curse then coming upon the Jews, (which is all that their words mean;) if thereby it could have been possible to have saved the whole nation. But such high expressions of affection, are always well understood, in all books and in all languages, to have, not a literal, but a figurative meaning. A Christian's duty of doing all things to the Glory of God, signifies plainly this only; that he ought always to prefer the interest of religion and virtue, before all worldly considerations whatsoever. Which that we may all do, &c.

## S E R M O N X.

Of acknowledging God in all our  
Ways.

By the Rev. Mr. ABERNETHY.

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PROV. iii. 6.

*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy path.*

**T**HE Supreme Being, from the creation of the world, has made the transcendent excellencies of his nature intelligible to mankind, whereby he of right demands our adoration and dutiful acknowledgments, having planted in our minds those affections which make us capable of them. If we set before ourselves, in our calm and deliberate thoughts, a character comprehending perfect wisdom, power, rectitude, and goodness; reverence, esteem, love, a desire of imitation, and of approving ourselves to such a Being, will arise in  
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our minds. And since God has clearly shewn that this is his true character, no reason can be given for any man's with-holding that practical affectionate regard from him, but ignorance, inattention, or impure lusts, which deprave and corrupt the mind. Ignorance is inexcusable, the evidence being so plain and strong; and for inattention, as well as corrupt lusts, 'tis what, if we reflect upon it at all, our hearts must condemn us for. Thus it is evident that the worship of the Deity, or the acknowledging him in general, the moral and principal part of it, has a just foundation in the constitution of our nature, and is as apparent to our reason as any other branch of our duty.

But, it is not only the existence of God and his perfections abstractedly considered, which call for our dutiful respect; every man may discern, and the duly attentive do discern, that he is intimately present with all his creatures, every where, and at all times, exercising his attributes of power and wisdom, righteousness and goodness; and that with him we have to do in a variety of relations, as our Maker, our Preserver, our Benefactor, and our sovereign Lord. Hence arise particular duties or exercises of piety, extending to the whole compass of our life and affairs, all imported in Solomon's comprehensive exhortation here, *in all thy ways acknowledge him*, which I shall endeavour to explain in the following discourse; and then I will consider, secondly, the consequent great advantage which is said to attend  
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our thus acknowledging God in our ways, namely, that he will direct our paths.

First, the exhortation is, *in all thy ways acknowledge God*, that is, in all thy designs and affairs, all thy deliberate actions and courses of action, for that is the meaning of our *ways*, morally considered, and according to the stile of the Scripture. If the human life contains a variety of powers capable of being exercised with design, if we can reflect upon this so as to discern the ends of our nature, with its various parts, and the dependence it has upon God, that our powers are wholly derived from him, and preserved by him in a condition of exerting themselves, *for he works in us to will and to do, of his good pleasure*, that he has interposed by his law to direct our manner of acting, thereby intending wisely and most effectually to carry us on to our highest perfection and happiness, and that the Divine Providence superintends the whole state and all the ways of men, disposing and over-ruling the event of them for the greatest good in the whole, and for the greatest particular advantage of every man, in exact proportion to the degree of his moral goodness; if these things be so, then hence may be inferred various instances or branches of acknowledgment we owe to God. As, first, the tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Scarcely is there any thing that appears more congruous, more becoming and laudable to the human mind, and the contrary more base and disagreeable, than gratitude, or an affectionate sense of fa-

favours received, with a disposition to make suitable returns for them. Let any man ask himself, whether he can help approving it? and whether he doth not despise, even abhor ingratitude? Nay, if he thinks he could possibly enjoy himself with satisfaction, being conscious of disesteem of, or even indifference to, a benefactor? Now, the obligation of gratitude peculiarly lies upon us with respect to God, because our all proceeds from his beneficence. Whatever we are, or do, or enjoy, we owe to him, not only as the original donor, but the constant preserver and supporter by the immediate interposition of his own power, in whose hand is the *soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.* \* Solomon tells us that *a man's goings are from the Lord*, all the exertions of our faculties are under the Divine direction and controul. And Daniel says to Belshazzar, king of Babylon, ‡ *In whose (that is God's) hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways*: from that consideration reproving him for not glorifying or acknowledging God. If there be any good in our ways, any privilege in the exercise of our intellectual capacities, if we have any solicitude about the issue of our designs and affairs; all these are from God, absolutely depending upon him; therefore he claims our praise.

This is a duty often recommended to us in Scripture. In the book of Psalms we are frequently called upon to employ ourselves in celebrating the glory of the Divine Perfections, ma-

\* Prov. xx. 24.

‡ Dan. v. 23.

nifested in the creation of the world, and the administration of Providence. Man, by his capacities, and by his situation, is constituted the priest of this earth, and the inferior creatures it contains, as well as in some sense their lord, that is, by presenting to his and their Maker, the sacrifice of their praises, which they offer in their silent way; and it is his office to put into form, and actively to employ himself in rendering that grateful tribute which they lay before his understanding. But, since his own being, his own faculties, and all his ways, the entire compass of his designs and interests, are from God, and in his hands; since he lives, and moves, and has his being in God, it would be the utmost stupidity not to praise him. This was the guilt charged upon the Heathen nations, in which they were utterly inexcusable||, *that when they knew God, (they could not be altogether ignorant, having so sufficient means of knowing him from his works) yet they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.* But it will still be more inexcusable in us, when that which may be known of him, of his nature and perfections, of his providence intimately near, taking all our ways and concerns under its inspection, care, and influence, and the service he expects from us; when all this, I say, is so clearly laid before us, by an express revelation. Let me only add, under this head, that the formal expressions of gratitude, without the inward affectionate sense and feeling of it in our



own minds, can answer no good end ; they can neither satisfy the demands of reason and conscience, yield to ourselves any true enjoyment, nor please God. The least attention to our natural sentiments concerning right and good, and to our notions of the Deity, of his nature and attributes, will convince us, that the duty of thanksgiving is not fulfilled in what the prophet calls the *calves of our lips*, nor are our words of any value at all, farther than as they proceed from a sincere prevalent affection, in which gratitude essentially consists. Let us therefore always carefully attend to the habitual temper of our spirits ; try whether the bent of them be to entertain a delightful sense of the daily communications of the Divine Goodness to us ; and, whatever occurs to us in the course of things, whether ordinary, or in a peculiar sensible manner affecting our condition, to raise our thoughts to the contemplation of God's interposing as the sovereign, wise, and gracious disposer. And let us constantly endeavour to cultivate such a temper, by often engaging our minds to such designed and deliberate meditation, as shall tend to raise and confirm it. The natural operation of gratitude in the heart is to think often and with pleasure on the benefactor, and all the circumstances whereby his beneficence is heightened in its esteem. And the mind which is so disposed towards God, must in all its ways find a multitude of occasions which invite to this.

Secondly, another instance of our acknowledging God in our ways, is, the forming our  
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## 158 *Of acknowledging God in all our Ways.*

purposes and the measures of our conduct by a regard to his will. Since he has been pleased to become our guide, he has vouchsafed to shew us that which is good, and what he requires of us, by *writing the work of his law upon our hearts, and by giving us his word to be a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path*, our acknowledging him must import our following his direction. What can be a more natural expression of our owning God to be what he really is, and what we profess to believe he is, the supreme Lord of the universe, the purest and most perfect of all beings, infinitely wise and good; what can be a more natural expression of this, I say, than our imitating him as far as we can, and doing his will, or keeping his commandments. St. Paul had reason to say as he doth \* of those whose *minds and consciences are defiled, the disobedient, and to good works reprobate, that, though they profess to know God, or in words acknowledge him, yet, in reality and in works, they deny him*. The notices of his will, or the work of his law, is written upon our hearts in so plain characters, that it is utterly impossible to reconcile a wicked course of life to an affectionate and lively sense of him upon our minds.

But, the man who would practically and constantly acknowledge God in his ways, so, as to enjoy the approbation of God and of his own conscience, ought to consider the extent of his law, both in its precepts and prohibitions: that it not only requires an abstinence from gross

\* Tit. i. 16.

crimes, and the regularity of our external actions ; but enjoins also a heavenly, a pure, a spiritual, a virtuous temper of mind upon all occasions ; to preserve which a constant and careful attention to our hearts, the course of our affections and our thoughts, will be necessary. The law of God is also *exceeding broad* or extensive in another respect, that is, it takes within its direction all our affairs, every important article of business, all our counsels, our deliberate designs and measures. Whatever the particular object of our desires and pursuits be, whatever the concerns we are immediately employed about, not merely those of religion, but which relate to our interests in this life, our commerce with our fellow-creatures, the exchange of offices with our relatives of mankind, or schemes for advancing ourselves ; still our counsels should be taken, our designs carried on, with a regard to God, to his authority and laws. Nay, St. Paul teaches Christians to govern themselves by this rule, even in matters which seem to be the most remote from religion, \* *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* These, and others like them, the most ordinary actions in life, which seem to be the functions of animal nature rather than the works of a Christian, yet the principles of piety interpose in the regulation of them ; still we should take care to keep within the bounds of virtue, which is glorifying God ; for it is the great end

\* 1 Cor. x. 31.



160 *Of acknowledging God in all our Ways.*

of his moral government in order to promote a rational happiness ; still we should endeavour by temperance to preserve the freedom of our minds, and a just dominion over our appetites and passions ; we should study to avoid whatever may give offence to our fellow-servants of God, and to advance the honour of Christianity. It is not enough barely to avoid what appears plainly to be unlawful ; it should be our care to guide our affairs with discretion ; to manage them so, as, in the best manner we can, to serve the cause of truth, of piety, and virtue ; which is always uppermost in the heart of a good man, and to promote it ought to be the principal intention of all.

A third instance of acknowledging God in all our ways, is, putting our confidence in him, and committing our ways and our works to the conduct of his providence. We must consider ourselves as in an indigent and imperfect condition. We have not in our hands the government of the world, nor the disposal of events in it, even those relating to ourselves : experience shews that things fall out often otherwise than we wished or expected, and no project of ours can ascertain the issue we desire, nor all the diligence we can possibly use ; for it depends on causes intirely out of the reach of our knowledge and power. And yet we cannot help being solicitous about issues ; they are, some of them, of great importance to our own happiness, and to interests for which the best affections of our nature determine us to be  
greatly

greatly concerned. In such a case, what can we do but have our recourse to a superior directing cause and ruler, since we know there is such a one, infinitely powerful and infinitely wise, who not only is able by his interposition to prevent dangers which we cannot foresee, and bring to pass events which are beyond our comprehension and beyond our strength to accomplish, but actually *sees the end from the beginning*, has the whole chain and series of things at once in his view, an absolute dominion over all creatures, and who is as merciful and gracious as he is powerful and wise? What consolation can possibly arise in the mind of man with respect to futurity, if it be not from a firm persuasion of this principle? Supposing the world to be guided by blind chance, or fatal necessity, we must still labour under distressing uncertainty concerning all our interests, even to our very being. We know not but the next moment we shall cease to be, or be extremely miserable. *When our breath goeth out*, and we hold it by a very precarious tenure, *in that day our thoughts*, not only for the present state, but existence itself, *may perish*. On the contrary, here is a solid foundation for the mind to rest upon, that we are under the care of a wise and good Governor, who sees the remotest issues, and orders all things for the best, and who has, by clear evidence to our own reason and in his word, fixed the conditions upon which we may confidently hope for his favour, and assure our hearts before him. Thus the main end of our ways is secured; and since

VOL. I. M they

they are not in ourselves, as the prophet speaks,  
*\* O Lord, I know that the way of a man is not  
 in himself: it is not in man that walketh to di-  
 rect his steps; (the power by which he acts and  
 forms his designs is not self-original, but deri-  
 ved, and is preserved by the same cause which  
 created it) where is the man that can ascertain  
 the success of his ways, of his designs, and en-  
 deavours; † for the race is not to the swift,  
 nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise,  
 nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to  
 men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to  
 them all: that is, the event is to them utterly  
 uncertain, but fixed in the determinate counsel  
 and fore-knowledge of God, who wisely dispo-  
 ses things which seem to be altogether fortu-  
 itous. The lot falleth into the lap, says Solo-  
 mon ‡, but the disposal thereof is of the Lord.*  
 What then can be more reasonable and becom-  
 ing us, or what can afford more true satisfaction  
 to the mind, than to look to the supreme Re-  
 gent of nature, who by steady counsel governs  
 its whole course, and cast all our cares upon  
 him? And though thus we shall not know  
 every particular future event, we shall know  
 what is abundantly sufficient for the support of  
 a wise and good mind, that the greatest good is  
 constantly carried on, and it *shall be well with  
 the righteous.* And,

Lastly, this ought always to be accompanied  
 with resignation to the will of God, which also  
 is an important part of the duty comprehended

\* Jer. x. 23.      † Eccles. ix. 11.      ‡ Prov. xvi. 33.



in acknowledging him. Since it is impossible for us to know what is best in the whole, because our finite understandings cannot comprehend the intire connections and dependencies of things, and as there is no foundation of hope and comfort, but what arises from an implicit trust in that infinitely wise and good being who rules over all, so this is inseparable from an absolute submission to his will. For the events which seem to us for the present most grievous, and which therefore we are the most inclined to except out of our resignation, may be, for what we know, the best and most necessary in the scheme of his wise counsels for accomplishing the greatest good in the whole, and, in subordination to that, our own greatest happiness: nay, it must be so, if that good be the end of his administration, and he knows and has appointed the most effectual means in order to it. Is it not infinitely reasonable we should refer ourselves and all our concerns to that wisdom which is perfect, and that goodness to which we owe our being; which is the most free, unlimited, and unchangeable, not capable of being misled in its exercise, or abated by any mistake, any selfish affection, any prejudice, indigence, or private interest? No example of resignation among men is equal to that which God justly demands from us; no servant is so absolutely in the power of any human master; no parent, even the wisest and most affectionate, has so good a claim to the acquiescence of a child in his orders and appointments, because the disproportion

tion is infinitely greater between the Divine Power and Wisdom as well as Goodness, and our highest privileges or endowments, than between the most exalted capacity and condition of the best earthly parent, or greatest sovereign, and the meanest subject, or the weakest child. Such submission to God's will is often recommended to us in Scripture as an eminent part of our duty, and instances of it in the practice of good men recorded with high approbation. The instances of Eli and of David are mentioned with great applause, who meekly submitted to Providence in very great distress, and under the affecting apprehensions of most grievous calamities. The former ||, that eminently pious man, received with amazing equanimity the terrible denunciations of Divine judgments against him and his family: *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* The other of David \*, who when reduced to the last extremity by the unnatural rebellion of his son, driven from Jerusalem his imperial city, and the appointed place of religious solemnities; says, *If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.* Other examples there are most worthy of our notice, but the principal pattern which we should endeavour above all others to imitate, is, that of our Lord Jesus Christ, who

|| 1 Sam. iii. 18.

\* 2 Sam. xv. 25.

through the whole course of his life upon earth bore a variety of grief, hunger, thirst, weariness, poverty, the contradiction of sinners, indeed the most bitter reproaches, at last a cruel and ignominious death; all this he endured with the most perfect patience, intirely acquiescing in the pleasure of his heavenly Father, saying, *Not my will be done, but thine.* Let us *then walk as he did*, in all our ways acknowledging the sovereignty, the most perfect wisdom and goodness of God, by submitting in all events absolutely to his disposal. Having finished what I intended to say upon the first part of the text, the duty of acknowledging God in all our ways, I proceed,

Secondly, To consider the consequent advantage which is here said to follow the performance of this duty, namely, that *he will direct our paths.* As we are rational and free agents, capable of knowing the ends of our being, and of pursuing them with understanding and design, and as we are in a great measure entrusted with the care of our own happiness, which we obtain or come short of according to our behaviour, there is nothing of greater importance, and that we are more justly concerned about, than the direction of our paths. Other beings, I mean, those which are wholly passive and unintelligent, are carried to their proper ends, or they fulfil the law of their creation, without thought; they yield intirely to force, and are determined by the meer impressions of power; the brute animals always follow their instincts, and it is the law of their nature; for instincts



were planted in them to be the sole guide of their active powers. But man is of a quite different constitution ; he is endued with foresight and with liberty, he can examine the springs of his own actions, compare them with a rule, deliberate upon the motives of them, and weigh their consequences how they are like to affect him, not only at present, but even in distant futurity. Hence arises a solicitude concerning the measures of our conduct, especially because we are conscious of imperfection, and experience shews that there is a danger of mis-carrying. Men are often disappointed in their expectations, and the issue of their ways turns out quite contrary to what they designed and hoped for.

To proceed the more distinctly upon this subject, we may consider ourselves as under two different characters or capacities, which though not at all inconsistent, but connected together, yet they may be considered separately, and both make the right direction of our paths highly necessary. We may, I say, consider ourselves as moral agents, and as rational beings determined to intend and to pursue our own happiness, by all proper and reasonable methods in our power. The former is the highest character of man, whereby he is distinguished from other sensitive creatures. We have naturally a sense of right and wrong, of moral good and evil, and find ourselves under an obligation to avoid the one and do the other ; the original of which obligation I shall not now inquire into, but suppose it known to us all, and that it is our purpose

purpose to satisfy it, particularly, according to the Christian laws and profession. Now, to every one who is so convinced and sincerely disposed, it must appear of very great moment to have our paths well directed, that is, to be put and kept in such a temper of mind and tenor of conversation, as to amount to true virtue and religion, or intitle us to the character of Christ's sincere and approved disciples. This is to good men the object of their careful and constant attention; there is nothing so high in their esteem; nothing so employs their anxious thoughts; because they know their own weakness, their liableness to error, and that multitudes of those who join with them in the same religious profession, yet are really self-deceived, being *disobedient*, habitually insincere, to *good works reprobate* or disapproved, as not fulfilling them, and at last, come short of the *rest which remains to the people of God*, through what the apostle calls *unbelief*, that is, a prevailing hardened uncompliance with, and unsubmission of heart to, the laws of God, and his terms of acceptance. But it is not only the intention of a good man so far to walk in the path of righteousness, as to secure his felicity in a future state; he loves virtue for its own sake, and aspires still to higher measures of it, as the increasing glory and perfection of his nature; and by all the motives of religion he finds himself determined, not to rest contented with low attainments, but after the example of St. Paul \*, for-

\* Phil. iii. 13.

getting the things *which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Now, such direction God has graciously given his servants encouragement to hope for ; as their desire of it is certainly agreeable to his will, and all men who even by the light of nature had worthy and becoming notions of the Deity, thought he would and did interpose in human affairs for that end, so we are assured expressly, that it is the design of the gospel to *guide our feet in the paths of peace.* It is an important article of the new covenant he has made with his people, that he will *cause them to walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments,* which strongly represents the kind assistance he gives them for that end.

Another capacity in which we may consider ourselves is that of rational creatures intending and pursuing our own happiness. This, as I observed before, has a connection with the former ; for surely our greatest happiness depends on our moral character, and virtue is the solid foundation, indeed, the immediate source of our highest enjoyment ; yet they admit of a distinct consideration, and the last is more extensive.

The human life comprehends a great variety of powers and affections, to every one of which there is a suitable enjoyment annexed. The senses, the imagination, the understanding, have all their several pleasures belonging to them, which we reasonably pursue within their proper limits. But they all depend upon God, as truly as the noblest, the ultimate end of our being :

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it is by the blessing of God, what our Saviour calls, *the words proceeding out of his mouth*, the powerful command, the energy and influence of his providence, that life is sustained, we have health, our industry is rendered successful for getting wealth, honour, the comfort of society, knowledge ; in fine, every thing whereby our condition in this world is made agreeable ; and without his blessing, the concurring operation of providence directing our paths, countenancing and over-ruling the issues of them for good, without this, I say, all our ways, our schemes, counsels and endeavours, would be utterly ineffectual.

From what has been said, you will observe, that the direction of our paths attributed to God contains a variety of his operations. In general, Divine Providence, superintending all things, watching over and caring for even the most minute of them, (the very hairs of our heads are numbered) directs our paths, orders them aright, prevents emergents unforeseen by us which might have been fatal, guides our steps safely so as to escape from snares and dangers, and brings our course through the mazes of life, or a particular period of it, to a happy conclusion. The \* Psalmist describes God's care of communities, and the || prophet particularly, his care of Israel, both which may be applied to individuals of mankind ; I say, his care in leading them through various difficulties from a low condition in their beginnings

\* Psalm cvii.

|| Hosea xi.

or infancy, to an established and flourishing state. Every one of us upon a review of our own lives may discern that our steps have been marvellously conducted beyond the reach of our own counsels by over-ruling providence; so that by wisely observing, we may *understand the loving kindness of the Lord* in preventing evil, and doing us good far above our expectation. And especially every good man may with pleasure be convinced that Providence has favoured his escape from temptations which might have been most dangerous to his integrity, and happily carried him on in the paths of virtue. But as to this last mentioned, which is the greatest of our concerns, God interposes for our direction in another way, that is, by the concurring influence and operation of his spirit. Let no Christian make light of this, for there is a great and important reality in it; our Saviour has assured us that *his Father will give the holy spirit to them that ask him*; and it is the office of the spirit to lead the disciples of Christ in the way of truth and holiness.

I will add but this one observation, that the Divine direction of our paths is to be understood in a way suitable to our state, which has these two characters, it is moral, and it is imperfect. The Almighty Maker exerts his influence on our nature and its operative powers agreeably to its constitution, and so as not to impair, but preserve its voluntary agency. His guidance therefore doth not interfere with our choice, but over-rules it; presents occasions of acting, and engages our attention to them in a

way which we are not, nor can be, sensible of; and when we make wrong choices, which God, seeing them, permits, Providence turns the event to good by methods which surpass our comprehension. Our condition in this world must continue, I may say is appointed to be, imperfect both with respect to virtue and happiness; and therefore we are not to expect such a Divine conduct towards us as shall preserve our paths altogether free either from blame or pain. Yet is this intirely consistent with the rectitude, the wisdom, and goodness of the Supreme Being, which do not require that he should always act up to the plenitude of his own perfection in every work; but that his operations should be divers, according to the different capacities and conditions of the subjects, whereby a beautiful variety of effects is produced, all harmoniously conspiring to *shew his praise*. The path of an angel, though vastly more eminent in respect of its superior moral excellence and enjoyment, yet is not without the Divine direction; and the path of a weak sincere mortal in this state of discipline, though of a far lower consideration, is as truly a monument of God's goodness, wherein he constantly interposes by his Providence and his spirit, to bring it through many difficulties and infirmities to a happy conclusion.

The true application of this doctrine, is in the practice of universal religion; for what is that but a constant affectionate sense of God upon the mind, with the dispositions which naturally arise from it governing our lives, such as gratitude,



tude, confidence, purposes of obedience to his laws, and resignation to his providence, encouraged and animated by the lively expectation of his favour, of his daily interposing in our behalf to direct our affairs, and bring them to happy issues? How is the human life ennobled and exalted by this principle? It becomes divine. The life of a man considered only as a rational creature in this world, is in comparison but low and insipid; how vastly more sublime and important is it rendered, when God is taken into our thoughts, counsels, and actions? This brings a mighty increase of light, liberty, and joy.

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## S E R M O N    X I.

### The Reasonableness of Religion.

By the Rev. Mr. AMORY.

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J O B xxi. 15.

*What is the Almighty that we should serve him?  
And what Profit should we have if we pray  
unto him?*

**I**N these questions wicked men, insolent with their prosperity, are by Job represented expressing their contempt of religion, and insulting the religious, who put them in mind of their duty to God, and dependance upon him. Satisfactorily then to answer these questions is a matter of the greatest importance, for vindicating the honour of religion; and for giving to the pious a solid assurance, that they act rightly and reasonably in cultivating a religious temper, and that their \* *labour in the Lord shall not be in*

\* 1 Cor. xv. 58.

*vain.* To return such an answer to these questions is therefore what I shall now attempt. And thanks be to God, that by the bright evidences of his being and perfections, with which he hath filled the world, by the present good fruits naturally growing out of piety and obedience to him, and by the everlasting rewards which he hath prepared for the pious, and of which he hath given full assurance; he hath made it easy for us to satisfy such, as from a love of truth shall ask these questions, and to silence those who would insult us with them.

The first question relates to the Reasonableness, the second to the Advantages of religion. I would answer each distinctly, and confine myself at present to the first. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* What proofs are there of the real existence of him who is called Almighty?—Of what perfections is he possessor to make it reasonable for us to reverence and obey him?—What has he done for us, to lay us under obligations to serve him, and give him a right to demand it?—And finally, what proofs are there, that he regards our conduct, and is at all concerned whether we serve him or not?—These queries include the full meaning of the first question in the text, and a good answer to these will be a sufficient answer to it.

I. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Is he a real being whom men call Almighty; or a mere fiction of priests and politicians? Most certainly a real being; and we have stronger assurance of his existence, than of  
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the existence of any other being besides ourselves. That we ourselves exist we cannot doubt, or that we are capable of thought, design, action and enjoyment, and that we very lately began to be. That we did not make ourselves is very clear. We must then have been before we were; and have acted when we confessedly were nothing, and could have no power. Besides, we are conscious we have no such power as giving existence to ourselves or others; and that we cannot continue our life or happiness, but are entirely dependent on the will of some other. That our earthly parents are not the authors of our being is also most evident. They know not when nor how the bodies of their children are formed; and as to their souls, their nature, and wonderful faculties and their beginning to be, they know nothing. There must therefore exist some great invisible being, the parent of mankind, who continually forms and brings them into life; such constant effects produced throughout the world requiring a cause equal to them. And as no greater instance of power can be conceived than to cause that to exist which was not before, or to create, the \* *Father of our spirits* must be Almighty. And since no being can give the perfections of intelligence, liberty, power, goodness, and the like, to others, if he have them not himself to the greatest degree; the common Father of mankind must be possessed of the greatest understanding, wisdom, liberty, power, goodness, and

\* Heb. xii. 9.

the like valuable qualities. And as certainly as we ourselves are derived and dependent beings, there must be an Almighty from whom we derive, and who created us.

You might as reasonably affirm, this house was built, yet there was no builder; this clock made, yet there was no maker; as that we ourselves now are, and but lately began to be, and yet there was no mighty and intelligent cause that made us. Thus easily is the first question answered, Is he, whom men call Almighty, a real being? And we no sooner seriously consider ourselves, and the cause of our existence, than we discover him.

Further; we cannot doubt, whether a friend with whom we continually converse, and who does us a thousand good offices, really exists. That is, whether within the body there be an intelligent and benevolent cause which guides the motions and actions of the body. We know that the tongue cannot talk rationally, unless it was guided by a rational principle within; nor the hands perform continued offices of kindness, unless the principle that directed them was also benevolent. And we see that the body, when destitute of such a principle, or a soul to animate and guide it, is void of life, motion, and power. Now for the same reason that we conclude without hesitation, there is a rational and benevolent principle within the body, which is the source and director of its several actions, we must conclude, that there is a most wise and powerful and good God present throughout the material world,  
actuating

actuating and guiding it. The sun a thoughtless mass of fire, the ocean a senseless heap of waters, this earth a dead unactive globe of matter, and all the parts which compose it, in themselves void of life, thought, or motion, could no more move themselves in such a regular manner, and produce such innumerable varieties of skilful and beneficial effects, as day and night, summer and winter; and the inexhaustible plenty of trees, and fruits, and plants which cover the earth, and supply its numberless inhabitants, than the tongue of a human body could give me wise counsel, undirected by a rational principle; or the feet run to my assistance in every danger, without a friendly mind to excite and direct their motions.

Again; the sameness of nature among mankind all over the earth, the manifest adjustment and correspondence of their various powers, inclinations, and passions to each other, and to the world which they inhabit; and the visible subordination of all the other animals to mankind; and the healthfulness, fertility, and usefulness of the material world to the common good of the various creatures, in subordination to mankind; and these effected by the same laws of motion every where uniformly observed, prove men to have all one common Father, who made also and furnished their habitation. And these innumerable effects constantly produced, bearing on them the most evident characters of an all comprehending wisdom, and a most extensive benevolence, prove their great author not only Almighty, but most wise and



good. If a few actions of apparent thought, design, and kindness, determine us beyond all doubt to believe and own a wise and good principle within the body of a man, we call our friend; innumerable effects continually produced in the world about us, and stamped with the most evident characters of the highest wisdom, power, and goodness, and by the instrumentality of causes, themselves void of all thought, power, and motion, must, if we reason fairly and consistently, determine us yet more firmly to believe, and more heartily own a most wise, powerful, and good mind, actuating the whole world; and who since he continually acts cannot but always be. And this has brought us to the

II. Question included in the first part of the text, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* Of what perfections is he possessed, which should make it reasonable for us to reverence and obey him? To this we answer, every perfection which we find in ourselves, or can trace in the world, and in the greatest degree conceivable. Service when rendered to the Almighty, denotes the highest esteem and veneration of his excellencies, a strong concern to be approved by him, a cheerful practice of whatever we judge well pleasing to him, and of consequence as serious a care to avoid whatever would displease him. The excellencies which render a being worthy such regards from rational creatures are wisdom, power, goodness, and righteousness; and the being in the sacred Scriptures called Al-

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Almighty possesses these in the most exalted degrees.

It is natural and reasonable to desire to be approved, and to be willing to be guided, by persons of distinguished wisdom; who are good judges of what is excellent, and who know what is best to be done. And can we doubt whether that being be most wise, who hath disposed the matter of the world into so grand, and beautiful, and useful a form; who is the author of the light and glory, and influences of the sun; who raised the hills, and spread the plains; who produces with infinite variety out of the same mass of earth, plants, flowers, fruits, grain, and trees; and who contrived and formed the numberless tribes of living creatures spread over the earth, gliding through the air, or inhabiting the waters, each beautiful in its kind, and fitted to attain and enjoy its proper good? Can we doubt whether he knew what ends were worthiest to be chosen, and what means best adapted to effect them, who hath thus proposed and effected in so great a diversity of ways the best of ends, the good and well-being of an infinite variety of creatures? Must we not admire and adore the wisdom of the Almighty, who hath contrived and produced all this grandeur, beauty, and good? Must we not esteem it our highest honour, if we can act so as to become approved by him? And ignorant as we are in many cases, and liable to be deceived, must we not think it our happiness to be conducted by him in the paths which

lead to true good, and the most lasting self enjoyment?

Further; that we did not give ourselves the intelligence and reason we are endowed with, but received them from the Almighty, was just proved; he then who hath formed us, capable of discerning and approving what is morally beautiful and good in actions, must not he be wise himself to discern it with the most perfect exactness? He who hath made us able to lay wise designs, and pursue them with prudence and success, must not he have a much larger fund of wisdom in himself? For as the pious Psalmist justly reasons, *\* He that formed the ear, shall not be hear? He that formed the eye, shall not be see? And he that giveth man understanding, shall not be know?* And if he be thus wise to discern what is excellent, and worthy to be chosen and practised, and the contrary, is it not reasonable to desire his approbation in the practice of what is good, and to dread doing under his observation what he must condemn, what will make us appear foolish and guilty in his eye? Must it not also be reasonable, if he will condescend to direct us how we should act in life, to regard his instructions, and chearfully follow them, as the dictates of unerring wisdom?

Again; power, especially under the guidance of infallible wisdom, is another perfection which commands our veneration of the possessor, and with reason makes us desirous of pleasing him,

\* Psal. xciv. 9, 10.



and fearful of offending him; since it promises all good and happiness to those who can engage it on their side, and threatens all evil to those who provoke it. If God then be indeed Almighty, what reasonable person but would serve him, and endeavour uniformly to practise what he recommends, and avoid what he forbids?

\* *We should walk before him, and study to be perfect.* And as our Saviour directs, || *Fear him, who can not only kill the body, but destroy both body and soul in hell.* And certainly if any power is to be regarded it is his, who as he had power to create, can also destroy; who having formed all the various capacities of happiness, and all the objects of enjoyment in the world, can make happy whom he chuses to make happy. Who as he † *stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth* ‡, guides the seasons, heaves the ocean, and rolls the tide, and raises and directs the stormy wind, can effectually secure every good to those who are under his protection; and with ease inflict every evil on those who by wickedness deserve punishment.

Again; what is amiable and venerable like goodness, or a steady and disinterested disposition to communicate good, and delight in it? Who but would cheerfully strive to please a Being, that delighted in making happy all qualified for happiness? Who but would with pleasure practise what is recommended to him

\* Gen. xvii. 1.    || Luke xii. 4.    † Isaiah xl. 22.  
‡ Psalm cii. 25. and cvii. 25.

by a Being, whose wisdom to discern what is best, and his kindness to prescribe it are unquestionable? And who but would dread, by wicked and mischievous actions, to displease that goodness, which delights to make all happy; and would especially make those happy, who comply with its benevolent designs? Who then that is reasonable will neglect to serve God, since he is not only almighty, the greatest, but is also the best of beings? Is our nature formed with kind affections which prompt us to desire and delight in the good of others, and do we naturally approve a disinterested benevolence; and must not the Being who made us capable of discerning its beauty himself discern it? And must not he who gave us the kind affections so essential to the general good, be benevolent himself in a much greater degree, and after a more perfect manner? And the heavenly Father, as our divine \* Master strongly reasons, far transcend in goodness *earthly parents*, to whom he hath given their kind affections? If to form one capacity of good and to fill it, be an indisputable instance of goodness; surely that Being must be infinitely good, who hath formed innumerable creatures with different capacities of good and enjoyment, and filled the world with suitable provision; and who continually *opens his hand, and satisfies the desires of every living thing* ||.

Finally; if to power, wisdom, and goodness, we add righteousness, and these several excel-

\* Matt. vii. 11.

|| Psal. cxlv. 9, 16.

lencies are supposed to exist together in their highest degrees, we must surely judge it reasonable to pay the utmost veneration to the Being whose perfections they are ; readily to practise what he commands, and with all our care to decline what he condemns ; and all these perfections in a supreme degree belong to Almighty God. His goodness is not a blind undistinguishing fondness, but the result of the most consummate wisdom, and determined by it. There is a difference as to good or ill desert in characters and actions, this he cannot but discern ; approve what deserves approbation, and in proportion to its worth, and be displeased at the contrary in exact proportion to its ill desert ; and behave accordingly towards the several agents, whose different characters are distinguished by the prevalence of amiable or base dispositions. And this is righteousness, to be affected and to act towards all as they deserve. Can we then imagine any being so fit as God to give laws to all others, or so worthy to be revered and obeyed by them ? He cannot err in giving laws, or in distributing proper rewards and punishments ; having all power he may be depended upon to exert it in making happy the well-deserving, and punishing the wicked ; and being supreme in goodness, he will not fail of thus exerting his perfections, as this is evidently the best manner of exerting them, and most conducive to the good of the universe. But

III. Should it be granted that the Almighty is thus qualified to give laws and govern the



world, yet what right has he thus to rule, to reward or punish us? And what has he done for us, which can oblige us to serve him, and render us guilty and deserving of punishment if we refuse it? What was advanced and proved in answer to the first question will make it easy to return a satisfying answer to this. If the Almighty gave us our being, and all our faculties of action and enjoyment, we are entirely his, and he may do what he will with his own. He hath an unquestionable right to direct how we shall exert the powers which he hath given us, and to punish us if we abuse them. Supposing then, that the God who hath given us our rational powers should require, that we often employ them in meditating on his perfections and works, acknowledging his daily benefits, and imitating him in the practice of righteousness and goodness; what are we that we should pretend to dispute his right to demand this from us, or to punish us if we refuse it?

Again: as he made us, he maintains us in life. The right order of our minds, and the health and vigor of our bodies are continually preserved by him, and every good thing we have is his gift. His sun enlightens and warms us, his air fans the vital spark within, his earth supports us, his animals and fruits feed and delight us; and we cannot name a good which we do not owe to him, as well as the power of enjoying it. If he therefore command us to exert the vigor of our bodies, and to use his bounties within the limits of temperance, chastity,

stity, and justice, what pretence have we to dispute these commands of the Almighty? Or how can we hope to be secure against his justice if we do? Certainly nothing can be more reasonable than that he should direct the application of his own gifts, and that we should believe he will punish an abuse of his blessings, to the injuring others, and corrupting ourselves, destroying the strength and purity of our minds, and the health of our bodies. And as we owe every thing to his bounty, should not gratitude make us studious of pleasing him, and dispose us to celebrate with warm affections his innumerable benefits, and to practise whatever may make his creatures happy; the most acceptable return to the supreme goodness? Must not that mind be sunk into inexcusable stupidity and baseness, which does not see and feel the obligation to serve a constant, unwearied, and most generous benefactor?

If God had not created us, yet his supreme perfection would have rendered it reasonable for us to be governed by his laws; and if we injured others, he would certainly have a right to vindicate the oppressed, and to punish the wrong doers, however his right to punish other faults might be disputed. But when we owe every thing to this Almighty Being, when the powers we misemploy, and the good things we abuse are entirely his, there is no room left to question his authority to give us laws, and to reward or punish us as we shall deserve. No room to insist in a way of contradiction on the question, *Who is the Almighty that we should serve*

*serve him?* We may rather ask, where is the man that can seriously doubt, whether he ought to reverence and obey his Almighty Creator, and continual Preserver, the giver of all his blessings, and the God *in whose hand his breath is, and whose are all his ways.* Dan. v. 23.

IV. Granting all this, the right of God to give us laws, our obligation if he did it to serve him, and the guilt and danger of refusing it; yet some will ask, what reason have you to think that God at all concerns himself whether we serve him or not, that he regards our actions, and is any more pleased or displeased with one way of acting than another?

That God is present with us, and knows after what manner we behave is most evident, from what has been already proved. He who continues the action and regularity of that nice engine the human body, and the reason of the human mind, must certainly know all the actions of the body, and thoughts of the mind. *He is not far from any of us, in whom we live, and move, and have our being.* Acts xvii. 27, 28. That Almighty Being whose hand unwearied rolls round the sun, and darts his beams; who raises the vapours, and sends them down again in fruitful showers, and who guides through the fine channels, which compose the bodies of plants and trees, the proper particles for the growth of all; he who thus constantly acts wisely and mightily all around us, must certainly know whatever is done under the sun.

But granting then that God knows all, what reason have we to think that he approves one disposition



disposition or one way of acting more than another, justice rather than injustice, or piety than profaneness? To this question also we have a good answer ready. If there be in reality an essential difference in dispositions and actions, and some are in themselves amiable and deserving approbation, and others evil and hateful, God who sees all things must see this difference, and in consequence be suitably disposed, and act suitably towards the several agents whose characters they constitute. And who that understands the terms can seriously doubt, whether there be a difference in worth and good desert, between humanity and cruelty, fidelity and treachery, gratitude and ingratitude, preserving the health of our bodies and the vigor of our minds by temperance, or destroying both by the contrary? I am persuaded there is not one who reads this, but sees and feels the difference; and though he may have acted wrong, seduced by partial views of pleasure or interest, you no sooner propose a case to him, wherein his interest or pleasure are not concerned, but he would immediately approve the grateful, the honest, and humane character and action, and condemn the contrary. If then the unprejudiced reason of every man sees this difference, a most wise God certainly sees it. And if he sees one sort of actions and characters to be amiable, and deserving favour and encouragement, and the other odious, and deserving punishment, he who hath no blind passion or partial interest to bias him, will certainly behave suitably towards persons of  
these

these different characters ; make the one happy in proportion to their love and practice of what is morally good, and the other wretched in proportion to their general choice and practice of wickedness.

Further : as we are naturally formed to approve one sort of actions and to condemn another, and this judgment is the result of our reasonable nature, it is consequently the judgment of the author of our nature ; and by forming us to approve righteousness, goodness, and mercy, he hath declared it to be his will that we should practise these ; and by forming us to dislike and condemn the other, that it is his will that we should abstain from them. And the pleasing serenity and noble satisfactions which naturally arise in the mind from conscious goodness and integrity, are a reward which the author of the human frame hath immediately annexed to virtuous practice, and an assurance of his fully rewarding it. While that oppressing shame, that painful self condemnation, and those restless suspicions and fears, which accompany and follow known injustice and wickedness, are punishments at present inflicted by the Author of Nature on the vicious ; standing declarations of his abhorring their conduct, and earnestness of his punishing them to the full of their deserts.

Finally ; the natural tendency of reverence, gratitude, and submission to God, of justice, fidelity, benevolence and compassion to men, and of chastity and temperance in regard to ourselves ; to promote private and public good,  
and

and the numberless mischiefs caused to private persons, and to society, from irreligion and profaneness, from injustice, treachery, cruelty, lewdness and intemperance, are manifest proofs that a wise and good God, the author of this constitution, approves one sort of characters and actions, and is displeased with the other. That God wills and delights in the general good of his creatures appears from the frame of the world, and the provision he hath therein made for it; and from the tendency of the established laws of nature to this end. If then, as appears from his fixed course of acting, the good of his creatures be the design and delight of the Deity, it necessarily follows, that he delights in those persons and actions which contribute to the general good, and is displeased with those that disturb society, and ruin its happiness, the one forwarding his great design, the other opposing it. If the general observance of the laws of piety, righteousness, goodness, and temperance, be as subservient to the general good, as the execution of those natural laws according to which the sun rises and shines, vapors fall, and the tides roll; the God, whose goodness determines him constantly to execute these, must for the same reason will, that men whom he has made capable of a voluntary concurrence with him, should co-operate with him in promoting the universal good, by constantly observing the other; and favour or dislike them according as they do or do not conform to his design. And as distributing



buting suitable rewards or punishments, thus encouraging that course of actions which promotes his great design, and restraining that which opposes it, is a necessary means to accomplish and secure the general good, God, as a most wise and benevolent Being, must be confessed to approve and favour the pious, and righteous, and good, and disapprove the profane and wicked; and will certainly manifest in the properest way his love of the one and abhorrence of the other; and nothing can concern us in regard to duty, gratitude, and interest like this, that we *serve the Almighty*. And in the words of the wisest of kings we reasonably conclude, that *to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole of man*; (Ecclesi. xii. 13, 14.) the whole of his duty, wisdom, and happiness. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Agreeably to this reasoning, in the revelation which God hath made of his will to mankind by his Son, and confirmed by very many great and incontestible mirables he hath taught us, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* Tit. ii. 12. *Who will render to all according to their works; unto them who by a patient continuance in well doing, have sought for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them who have not obeyed the*  
truth,

*truth, but obeyed unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that hath done evil. Rom. ii. 6. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. 2 Theff. i. 9.*

This may be sufficient as an answer to the first question, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* and in proof of the reasonableness of religion. The answer to the other question will be given in the next discourse, and we shall close this with two or three reflections.

I. From hence we may learn the usefulness of reason, and of serious consideration, to religion. The many evidences supplied by reason of the great principles of religion, which have been just set before you, are a sufficient proof, that reason is not an enemy to religion, but the greatest friend; and that it is not because persons are guided by reason, that they are irreligious, but because they are governed by sense, appetite, passion, and prejudice, and seldom apply their thoughts to religion, or ingage their reason on this most important subject, and attend to what it dictates. Although the proofs of the being, perfections, and moral Providence of God, of an essential difference in human actions, and of a future state of recompences are so many, yet if we would apprehend them in their full evidence, frequent retirement, and serious consideration are necessary. While persons are engaged in a hurry of business, or a round of sensual pleasure and amusement, these great truths affect them no more than a discourse  
on

on politics would a person, whose thoughts were taken up with a pleasurable assignation, and finding means to accomplish it. If we therefore would discern the great truths of religion in the brightness of their evidence, we must closely apply our reason to these subjects, and meditate often and seriously upon them. Error, irreligion, and immorality proceed in a great part from thoughtlessness; and frequent serious consideration is the beginning of religious wisdom and happiness.

2. From the preceding discourse may be inferred the absolute necessity of real religion and goodness, in order to our acceptance with God, and final felicity. These are not required of us by God out of mere pleasure, or laws which he can set aside or alter, but their acceptableness to God is founded in the unchangeable nature and relations of things. As long as God continues wise and good, he will approve this way of acting, and condemn the contrary. And as long as we are rational creatures, we must be made wretched by prevailing wickedness and impiety; or happy by virtue and religion. When a private family can flourish and be made happy, by disrespect to the head of it, by mutual violence, quarrels, injustice and hatred, by lewdness and intemperance; and a wise and good parent approve these dispositions and practices in his children and servants; then, and not till then, may we reasonably suppose, that the most wise and good God, the common Father of mankind, will approve ingratitude and disobedience to himself, injustice and violence



violence towards others, and an intemperate abuse of his bounties ; and cease to delight in and make happy the pious, grateful, modest, benevolent, chaste, and temperate. It is not therefore a matter of indifference to us, whether in the present life we cultivate and establish a pious and virtuous temper, but as absolutely necessary to our acceptance with God, as it is certain that God is wise and good.

3. We may further learn from this discourse the wisdom of daily devotion, prayer, and praise. By these we chiefly keep present to our minds the great truths and objects of religion, the all-pervading presence, the supreme perfections, and moral providence of God ; his unchangeable love of righteousness, and abhorrence of wickedness, and his certain purpose of gloriously rewarding the one, and fully punishing the other in the next state. That we have these truths clearly and habitually present to our minds, is necessary to our behaving well in a world of temptations ; and that we behave well is necessary to our acceptance with God, and our everlasting felicity. Daily therefore to retire from the world, and by fixed meditation and warm devotion affect our minds with these great truths, is of the utmost importance to our arriving at a steady virtue, and enjoying in this life the pleasures of a good conscience, and a clear sense of the divine favour, and the never-ending rewards of goodness in the next. It is therefore a reasonable and a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and sing praises to the

*Most High; to recollect his loving kindness in the morning, and his faithfulness every night. Psal. xcii. 1, 2.*

4. From what has been offered we may also learn the great usefulness and value of the Christian Revelation, which contains and establishes all those great and noble truths that reason has proved, and hath enabled our reason to prove them so clearly. Though these truths may be thus discovered and proved by reason, yet the \* greatest men destitute of our revelation failed of discovering and proving them in a clear, full, and satisfying manner. We are greatly obliged to the Gospel for giving us in an easy manner, and without any mixture of error, all the great principles and rules of religion and morality, which is a mighty help towards demonstrating their truth and excellence. And we are unspeakably indebted to the goodness of God, that when the light of reason was in a great measure extinguished among the nations, by prevailing error and idolatry, and *the world with all it's wisdom knew not God*, (1 Cor. i. 21.) he was then pleased by the Gospel *to turn men from darkness to light*, (Acts xxvi. 18.) and guide them thro' the paths of a rational piety and solid virtue to true satisfaction here, and everlasting perfection and happiness in the life to come.

\* See Cicero de Nat. Deorum.

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## S E R M O N    X I I .

### The Advantages of Prayer.

By the Rev. Mr. AMORY.

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J O B xxi. 15.

*What is the Almighty that we should serve him?  
And what Profit should we have if we pray  
unto him?*

**H**AVING, in answer to the first question of the text, shewn in the preceding discourse the reasonableness of religion, I shall now in answer to the second shew the Advantages of it in some of the principal instances, or *what profit we shall have if we pray unto the Almighty*. Prayer to God, which is one main part of a religious temper, and an excellent means of cherishing it, seems here, according to the common style of Scripture, to be put for the whole of religion peculiarly so called. It therefore includes here a strong and habitual sense of the presence, perfections, and providence



dence of the Almighty, exprest and improved by a daily acknowledgment and adoration of his perfections, and study and celebration of his works ; by constant grateful praises for his constant benefits, humble and earnest supplications of his favour, guidance and supplies ; a chearful and prevailing concern to be approved of him in the practice of all goodness, and a filial dread of offending him by a wicked conduct ; and a firm dependence on the wisdom and goodness of his government for our enjoying all proper good here in a way of well-doing ; and for receiving in the next state his bountiful rewards of a virtue and piety cultivated and approved in the present.

Taking prayer in this large signification for a religious temper, expressed and cherished by daily, humble, and grateful addresses to God, if it be asked, *What profit shall we have from it ?* We can answer, the advantages of it are many and great, too many to be reckoned in this discourse ; yet it is hoped enough will be mentioned to prove, that it is as much our wisdom and happiness as our duty to be religious. Let the wise and considerate judge whether it be not by the following.

1. The pleasure and satisfaction immediately attending the several acts and instances of a devout temper, prove it to be profitable that we *pray to the Almighty*. If good and happiness be gain, what immediately gives these must be profitable. Pleasure arises from actions suited to the nature of the agent ; in the preceding discourse we proved religion to be reasonable,  
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the best instances then of a reasonable temper must give the highest pleasure to a rational being in his right state. And experience confirms what thus appears to be true in speculation.

The grandeur and beauty of objects and characters are the chief sources of the pleasure we receive in contemplating them. And what objects, or what character, can compare for grandeur and beauty with the perfections and works of the Almighty, which employ the attention of the mind in prayer? Fixedly to contemplate an alwise, almighty, and infinitely good Being, actuating an immense universe, and upholding and supplying numberless varieties of creatures; turning round the sun, darting its beams, and by them inlightening and warming attendant worlds; directing the moon in her nightly course, and all the starry hosts in their courses; heaving the ocean, raising from it fresh vapours, and sending them down again in fruitful showers; producing continually with infinite abundance and variety, herbs and fruits, and with them covering the earth; and in successive generations introducing into existence innumerable living creatures to rejoice in his bounties; and amidst all this peculiarly attentive to the good of our numerous race, whom he waits to train to virtue and piety, and prepare for everlasting blessedness—To contemplate a wisdom unperplexed by the affairs of an universe, providing for every case, and ordering all with perfect ease for the best purposes; a power equal to the constantly actuating the boundless  
O 3 creation,

creation, and moving those unmeasurable globes that roll in it, and unfainting, though infinitely exerted, through countless ages ; and especially to meditate on a goodness equal to the communicating an infinity of good, inexhaustible by infinite supplies continually drawn from it, unalterable by numberless instances of folly and ingratitude, in the rational creatures of whom he condescends to take the care ; and always disposed to make every creature happy, who is at all fit for happiness — To contemplate this greatest and best of beings, his perfections and works, and the course of his Providence ; and correspondently to venerate and love him, to feel his presence, and triumph in the thoughts of being always encompassed with almighty wisdom and goodness ever attentive to our welfare—Say, can there be pleasures equal to what arise from thus employing our thoughts and affections ? Is not religion profitable which yields these pleasures ? And do not the greatest things which engage the thoughts and wonder of the irreligious appear mean and childish, when set against these, which prayer daily presents to the mind of the truly devout ?

Again : how great the pleasure of gratitude, which rises in proportion to the worth of the favours received, and the generous goodness of the benefactor ! How noble then must be the pleasure of frequently, with a warmth of affection, acknowledging our obligations to the best of Beings ! Who made us rational and immortal, that we might attain to an immortality of divine pleasures ; who hath assigned us but a  
short



short time of trial, and made the condition of our final blessedness obedience to commands, which are essential to present self-enjoyment, and perfective of our nature. Who was so strongly set on the design of man's eternal blessedness, that the general corruption of the world only excited him to recover it, from the dominion of vice, and of death, by the humiliation and death of his own son. Who continually supports us in life, supplies our wants, and guards us from evil. And who, though constantly beholding our ingratitude and disobedience, bears long with us, pursues still his kind design of preparing us for eternal glory and felicity, and who is ever compassionate and ready to forgive. To think that the infinitely great God, *before whom all nations are but as the dust of the balance; yea, less than nothing*, (Isaiah xl. 15, 17.) should be thus attentive to our happiness, what a flame of grateful love must it kindle; and how noble the pleasure of indulging the pious affections of admiration, gratitude and devotion! Hath he enjoyed pleasures worth naming, who hath been an utter stranger to pleasures of this kind?

Further: the meltings of a *Godly sorrow*, and an *ingenuous repentance*, (2 Cor. vii. 10.) give inexpressible ease and satisfaction to the convinced and humbled offender. To feel the bad temper of our souls gone, that we are again affected as we ought to be towards the best of Beings, and the best of parents, are strongly resolved on a right conduct for the future, and can think with some good degree of assurance,

that God is reconciled to us, and forgives our folly and ingratitude, must yield satisfactions great as the preceding pains of conscious guilt, and fearful apprehensions of the righteous displeasure of God.

Finally : to practise whatever is in itself good and amiable, animated with a view to the approbation of God, and by a desire of pleasing him ; to be conscious to an integrity and benevolence acceptable to God, and to be able with reason to think of ourselves as amiable in his sight ; and having made him returns which his unbounded benignity will most bountifully reward—Can the smiles of a king, or the flatteries of a court give equal satisfaction ? I want room to do full justice to this argument. Yet what has been suggested is itself a sufficient proof, that it is profitable to pray to God, since we cannot be truly religious, but we shall immediately be thus happy.

Let me only add, that it is supposed in order to our enjoying these satisfactions, that we have worthy and amiable apprehensions of God, uncorrupted by a sour superstition ; and that our hearts be clear from mean passions and engagements, since otherwise, these will hinder our attending to, and being suitably moved by the great and noble objects of religion.

2. There is profit to be found in praying to God, because Prayer by a natural influence calms our passions, and makes us considerate and wise. We more often err in the conduct of life, led aside by our passions, than through unavoidable ignorance, and the necessary ob-  
scurity

security of future events. Whatever therefore moderates our passions, and makes us cool and deliberate, must be greatly profitable. And this is done by Prayer, on which account the *Fear of God* is justly stiled *the beginning of wisdom*. Prov. i. 7. Have we not often experienced, that in the warmth of passion we have approved a particular pursuit as right and prudent, which, when we have considered it as about to be examined by a wise and faithful friend, we ourselves have seen to be wrong? The barely thinking what he would judge in the case, hath shewn us the faultiness of it. Thus the person accustomed to pray to a most righteous, good, and wise God, for direction and blessing in his affairs, will be led to think, are my designs and measures fit for such a Being to succeed? And this thought will go a great way to shew him, whether they are right or wrong.

Such a one can scarcely err in life through a narrow selfishness, and sordid avarice, who is accustomed to pray to a God infinitely benevolent; whose happiness arises from his being infinitely communicative of good to his creatures; whom therefore if he would resemble in excellence and happiness, it must be, by having as few wants of his own as possible, and doing as much good to others. He cannot easily sacrifice the usefulness and happiness of life to the mere shew of it, who is used to contemplate and address a God, whose excellence and happiness consist in wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. Nor can he readily sink into the  
in-



indulgencies of sense and appetite, into intemperance and debauchery, who frequently by Prayer converses with a most wise and good God ; whose natural image he bears, and who made him to be happy in knowledge, goodness, integrity, friendship, and beneficence ; who instead of designing he should die like the brutes, designed him for an immortality of rational pleasures with angels ; such a one therefore cannot allow himself to live like a brute.

Further : whatever exercises the understanding, and the nobler powers and affections of the soul, by a natural influence improves them. We cannot pray to any purpose but we must be considerate, use reflection, disengage ourselves from the hurry of sense and passion, and be affected with the great importance of wisdom, virtue, and goodness ; must accustom ourselves to govern our appetites and passions, and not be governed by them. If we therefore pray often and seriously, we shall become wiser and more considerate, and acquire a greater command over ourselves. Are not the most who miscarry in life, ruined by a stupid or gay thoughtlessness, or by an headlong pursuit of the pleasures of the body ? Must not Prayer therefore be greatly profitable, which accustoms us to sober thinking, and lessens our attachment to the meaner pleasures of sense, by giving us a taste of the noble satisfaction of truth, gratitude, goodness, and integrity ? Pleasures which never impair the constitution, stain the character, or hurt the fortune ; but on the contrary

trary have the best influence on all these. If we would therefore, especially at our setting out in life, escape being engaged beyond retreating in foolish, mean, and ruinous pursuits, let us increase the strength of our reason and of our noble affections, and their command over the meaner, by frequently employing them in fervent prayers and praises to the Almighty.

3. It is profitable to pray unto God, because Prayer, by a natural influence, establishes our integrity and virtue against temptations; thus makes us happy in ourselves, and gains us the esteem and confidence of others, which are of the utmost advantage in life.

As to ourselves, so much virtue is so much happiness. Temperance, chastity, well-governed passions, integrity and benevolence naturally make us happy, as they preserve the health of the body, and are themselves the health of the soul; as they secure us the approbation of our own minds, a good hope of the divine favour, and the love of others, and inspire a strong confidence in God, and the most cheering hopes for futurity and eternity. And Prayer naturally increases virtue, as it keeps in continual view the Almighty God, who is the supreme patron of virtue, and the sure and infinite rewarder of it; besides procuring his help in the practice. We cannot pray seriously and constantly but we must grow better men; for we cannot think of God aright, and seriously regard him, but we must be animated to all goodness; and we cannot increase in goodness, but we must increase in happiness. One great

part of Prayer is imploring Divine assistances, that we may acquire a steady command over our passions, and be formed to an active benevolence, and established virtue. The begging divine aids for these purposes will cherish in us a strong sense of the worth and importance of these dispositions, and their acceptableness to God, encourage us to strive for them, and determine us, as we would not trifle with God, to do what is in our power to attain what we desire him to grant as the greatest of favours. Earnest Prayer to God for others will as naturally cherish in our bosoms a warm benevolence; causing us constantly to regard the general good, as an event peculiarly pleasing to God, and exciting us to our utmost to promote that design, which we beseech the Almighty to succeed, and ourselves to do good to those, whom we intreat him to bless. This is the natural influence of Prayer to forward us in all virtuous practice, and every new degree of virtue is a higher degree of inward satisfaction and self-enjoyment.

Besides, it as naturally gains us the esteem and confidence of others. As we live in society our satisfaction and prosperity will be dependent on the regard and good will of the persons among whom we are conversant; and a great and established credit is so much certain power and wealth. Nothing renders persons esteemed and beloved like a command over their passions, a strict integrity, an open honesty, a generous benevolence, and a tender compassion; and nothing like frequent and  
fervent



fervent Prayer to a most righteous and merciful God, for exciting us to these virtues, and raising us above temptations. This must in part appear from what has been just offered, and a few reflections more will make it fully manifest.

Can we suppose that a person who in daily fervent prayer acknowledges, and commends himself to the providence and blessing of a governing God, who directs all events, delights in the good and upright, and promises to be *a sun and a shield; to give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from them*; (Ps. lxxxiv. 11.) that this person can see any great temptation, in an opportunity of making considerable gain by unrighteousness; who is assured of obtaining whatever is really good for him in a way of righteousness, and animated by a noble ambition to approve himself to a most righteous and ever present God; from whose view no secrecy can conceal, and for the loss of whose favour no wealth can recompence? The desire and hope of securing some good, or avoiding some evil, in a shorter and more effectual way than that of plain honesty, are the usual temptations with men to step aside out of this path. They fancy that they will just go a little out of the way to gain this advantage, and then return again; but they do not consider, that one act of falsehood and injustice often makes more necessary, either for concealing or supporting the first; till at length they are irrecoverably intangled in vice, and dishonesty becomes their settled character, and losing their credit, they  
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lose the greatest external enjoyment, the being esteemed and beloved, and the most effectual means for raising their fortunes.

Again : besides a firm integrity, a tender compassionateness of heart, and a generous beneficence, render persons exceedingly esteemed and beloved ; and over and above what was just mentioned of the efficacy of prayer to increase these, it has a most favourable influence upon them, by engaging us frequently to contemplate, love and celebrate the most bountiful, compassionate, and beneficent of all beings ; and this forms us to a resemblance of those excellencies, which we admire and love. It raises us also above the vain fear of wanting ourselves, what we charitably give away, and being losers by a generous beneficence ; as it assures us of the special favour and supplies of the great Governor of the world, who will delight in and make happy his children, that resemble him in goodness.

If therefore it be profitable, not only to enjoy uninterruptedly the pleasures of a good conscience, but to be generally beloved, esteemed, and confided in ; and an uncorrupted integrity and an extensive beneficence are the best means to make us so ; then it is profitable to *pray unto the Almighty*, which will naturally cherish these good dispositions.

4. It is *profitable to pray to the Almighty*, because it will produce a noble joy and confidence in him, and a permanent chearfulness and tranquility, amidst all the uncertainty of events. When we call any thing profitable,

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we mean, that it either gives happiness immediately, or the means of procuring it; Prayer therefore must be allowed very profitable, which infuses into the soul an exalted joy and lasting satisfaction. To consider the government of the world as administered by a God of boundless power, all comprehensive wisdom, and inexhaustible goodness; and all causes and events in his hands, who will *make all things to work together for good* (Rom. viii. 28.) to the pious and holy, the righteous and merciful; (Prov. iii. 4.) who will give them every real good, (Ps. xxxvii. 1.) and turn aside from them every real evil, and direct their paths to the most solid self-enjoyment here, and to the highest felicities of an everlasting state—To commend ourselves in daily fervent Prayer to this almighty friend, and to be fully assured that we are his care; who will guide us by his counsel, shield us by his power, and supply us from his treasures, until he bring us to his eternal kingdom and glory; what noble joy, what serene and lasting tranquility must this produce in the human heart, amidst all the wants, uncertainties, and evils of life! The favour, the treasures, the power, and promise of a king are compared to this a trifling security for the present life. Princes may fail, or change, or die. The most valuable goods are not in their power to give, such as true wisdom, the command over our passions, and the joys of an increasing virtue. There are also very great evils which their influence cannot remove, unruly passions, conscious guilt and baseness, de-

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served infamy, sickness, pain, and the dread of death. Whereas Almighty God, who hath promised the good man his favour, and whose perfections he contemplates, and whose promises he pleads in Prayer, can rectify every disorder of body and mind, and supply every real good to both. His wisdom cannot mistake what is best for us, nor his power be over-ruled, nor his goodness and faithfulness fail.

What joy then can compare with his, who daily considers himself as the charge of this God, and exults in the assurances of his protection, conduct, and bounty, while he shall be continued here ; and of being soon raised by him to the fulness of joy? Nay, the distress, uncertainty, and wretchedness, which prevail among those who are without hope in God, make him enjoy the more his own security under the divine favour. Like him who safe on shore, can fearless see the tempest rise, and hear it roar ; and when he beholds others tossed and shipwrecked, more sensibly feels his own happiness in being secured from their sufferings and dangers.

In all the mentioned instances of the profit we may have from Prayer, I have confined myself to the natural influence of it on our minds, and to present experience ; and all who will try may themselves know the truth of the assertion, and the advantage of the practice. This I have done, because the persons who asked the question, must be supposed to pay little regard to the promises of revelation. But besides these sensible and experienced advantages,

5. If we can trust to the clearest dictates of reason, or to the most express promises of revelation, a religious temper and conduct will certainly procure for us peculiar guidance, assistances, and supplies from an ever present God, though we cannot always distinctly know and assign them.

Reason assures us with the fullest evidence, that a most wise, righteous, good, all-powerful, and omnipresent God, the governor of the world, must approve and delight in the humble, grateful, righteous, and good, who acknowledge his providence and government, and study to please him. If God approve and delight in himself on account of his moral perfections, he will consequently be pleased with his reasonable creatures, in proportion as they resemble him in these; and by proper dispensations to them, encourage that temper and practice, which hath the kindest influence on these qualities; and as he hath all events in his direction, and all good in his gift, will order all for the best to them who trust in the Lord and do good.

And revelation authorizes and establishes these conclusions of reason. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.* Prov. iii. 4. *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* 2 Chron. i. 7. Thus Solomon advises, to whom God in answer to his Prayer granted wisdom superior to that of any mere man. And a greater than he, the Son of God, who came from God into the world, assures us in his name, that if *We pray in secret, our Father, who*

*seeth in secret, will reward us openly. Matt. vi. 6. And if earthly parents being evil yet give good gifts to their children, much more will our heavenly Father give good things, especially his holy spirit, to them that ask him. Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find; and pray, give us this day our daily bread, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Luke xi. 9. Which instructions and promises abundantly confirm the extensive directions and encouragements of his inspired apostle. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by Prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. Phil. iv. 6. And promises like this supported the faith and piety of good men before Christ. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him; (Ps. xci. 15.) to which might be added several before cited. It is therefore good for us to draw nigh unto God, who will guide us by his counsel, and afterward receive us unto glory; whereas they that are far from him shall perish. Ps. lxxiii. 24, 28.*

The ways in which God may really, though secretly, fulfil these promises, are many. For instance, by influencing the minds of the truly devout to take prudent and successful measures, and exciting and encouraging them to pursuits really good; or else turning them aside from such as would prove hurtful and ruinous.—By favourably disposing the minds of others towards them, presenting to their minds their good qualities in the most advantageous light, or softening their displeasure, and the like. God  
who



who is intimately present with all human minds, and regulates the rise and continuance of our ideas and thoughts, may very often really, tho' to us imperceptibly, do this. If upon our humble Prayer in sickness, the mind of the physician be directed to a successful prescription, the reward to Prayer is as real, as if we were cured by a miracle. If in reward to a pious temper and life, the minds of the rich are inclined to supply us in distress, the profit of Prayer is as real, as if like Elijah we were fed by a miracle. And if a pious person be secretly diverted from making a voyage which would have proved fatal to him, the profit of Prayer is as real, as if he had been permitted to set out to sea, and then like Jonah been saved by a miracle.

As it is most agreeable to the wise and uniform conduct of Divine Providence, not to interpose sensibly and miraculously, but in such secret ways to influence the human heart; and as the ways of doing this are many more than we can assign, we may certainly conclude Prayer to be greatly profitable, when both reason and revelation promise such peculiar favour, guidance, supplies, and protection from a governing God, to those who pray to him, and regularly trust in him. The Scripture history furnishes various instances of this kind interposition, and teaches us to trace the benefit to the real author, in the cases of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Christ, and his apostles. And the experience, and observation of the pious

and considerate, will furnish them with many more, wherein the kind direction of Providence has been evident to themselves, though not so clear to others; and wherein they have been able to say, with a rational assurance,—“ This blessing I owed to the peculiar favour of God—and this deliverance was a sensible reward to Prayer and a pious trust.” But I must leave these hints to be pursued in your own meditation, and hasten to a close.

6. Prayer to the Almighty is profitable, because it is the best relief under all distresses, and especially when death approaches. What ease and comfort have we found, by disburthening our sorrows into the bosom of a wise and cordial friend; what an unspeakably greater relief must it yield, to pour them out before an infinitely wise and good Father, whose bounty and compassion are the greatest conceivable, and his power equal to his goodness? The pious soul no longer feels the weight of its cares and troubles, when it has thus *cast them upon the Lord*. Psal. lv. 22. and 1 Pet. v. 7. Sicknes, losses, and disappointments, are no longer felt as evils, when considered as really directed by the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness for our greatest good; and when we have earnestly prayed to that God, who hath promised to comfort and support us, and to deliver us in the best time. To be subject to pain, sickness, and sorrows of various kinds, is the condition of all; to secure therefore by Prayer these divine consolations, is the wisdom of all.

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And then nothing is more certain, forget it as we may, than that we must all soon die; and that wealth, friends, pleasures, and natural fortitude, all fail us at death. The irreligious, who have lived without God in the world, with reason tremble at the thoughts of entering his immediate presence, and appearing before him as their judge. Having past their lives estranged from the satisfactions of goodness and devotion, and wholly possess'd by worldly cares and sensual pleasures, they have no taste or disposition for a spiritual and divine happiness, and no hope of enjoying it; but unable to delight themselves any longer here, are forced into another state, under an absolute despair of being happy therein. Conscious to no concern for pleasing God in life, but to numberless instances of ingratitude and disobedience, they stand shuddering and full of horror on the brink of eternity, yet must plunge into it, and with apprehensions of sinking into miseries great as their past guilt and ingratitude.

Whereas the good man, who hath *prayed without ceasing, and in every thing given thanks*, (1 Theff. v. 17, 18. Jude 21.) and been thus enabled to maintain warm, throughout life, a concern to please God, and to keep himself in his love; having been well accustomed to the pleasures of devotion, of contemplating the perfections, and works, and word of God, to the pleasures of gratitude and hope in him, and a sense of his approbation; and knowing these to be the most valuable satisfactions that a reasonable being can enjoy, and that they are possess'd



in the highest degree in heaven, it is no grief to him to quit the mean pleasures of the body, when he quits with it all its evils and imperfections. He can chearfully follow his *guardian angel* (Luke xvi. 22.) into the world of spirits, being no stranger to their employments and pleasures; and exulting in the hope of soon *seeing face to face* (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) that God, whom now *he sees but darkly* (Phil. i. 23.) through the veil of flesh, and that *Jesus whom having not seen he loves*; (1 Pet. i. 8.) and of being beyond all doubt assured of their approbation, the hope of whose favour now so much transports him; and of knowing, loving, praising, and adoring them in perfection, from whom he hath received such divine consolations in his imperfect devotions here. *Commending therefore his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father*, (Luke xxiii. 46.) Prayer, which hath so greatly contributed to prepare his soul for heaven, transports him to the joys of the Divine Presence, and the bliss of immortality. For,

7. As Prayer suits the soul to the blessedness expected after death, and thus by the divine promise gives us a title to possess it, it is *infinitely profitable to pray to the Almighty*. Reason convinces us, that the soul which hath of choice lived always estranged from God, and *said to the Almighty, depart from me*, and is thus grown absolutely unfit for the joys of his presence, must for ever want them. And it also convinces us, that the person, who when tried, whether amidst the pleasures and cares, and distractions of the world, he would cultivate

ultivate the love of God, a concern to please and resemble him in goodness, and a disposition for the pleasures of the clearest knowledge of God, the most exalted adoration and love, and perfect virtue; hath cultivated these dispositions, thus approved his love to God, and grown meet for the happiness of heaven, shall certainly enjoy it. The unbounded goodness of God determining him to make happy all his creatures, who are fit for happiness and comply with his design.

And these dictates of reason, revelation abundantly confirms, assures happiness, everlasting happiness, *to the pure in heart, to those that love God, draw nigh to him, and delight in him.* (Matt. v. 8. 1 Cor. ii. 7. Ps. lxxiii. 24. John xiv. 1. 1 Ep. iii. 2.) This blessedness which revelation promises after death, and for which Prayer thus prepares us, being compleat, divine and eternal, the profit we have by praying to the Almighty appears to be infinite. And bidding those who scoffing ask, *What profit shall we have if we pray to God?* (1 Pet. i. 3.) consider the full import of divine and everlasting blessedness, and look into the next world, and think what angels there enjoy for ever—what is the bliss of perfect minds, and immortal bodies, of perfection in knowledge, devotion, goodness, and friendship, and of possessing every satisfaction proper to a reasonable and immortal being.—We can with triumph tell them, This is the profit they have, who *pray to God*; for the repeated and express promises of this we praise him now, and in hope of the full accom-

*plishment will call upon him as long as we live.*

To persuade all to do this, is the only application that I shall make of this subject. If such be the profit, and these the rewards of Prayer, let us begin and close every day with secret fervent devotion. Let us delight to retreat from the world, and to converse with God on the Lord's Day. Let us often meditate on his works, and on his word. Let us enrich the relish of the good things of life by a sense of his goodness in them, and by the hope of far better blessings to eternity. Let us raise the conduct of life by a constant regard to his approbation; and secure solid supports under all the evils of it, and divine aids for the practice of our various duties, by humble and fervent addresses to the Father of mercies. And if we would succeed, let us remember, that formal and spiritless petitions and praises, will not procure these blessings. Unless our understandings, our hearts, and affections are exercised in our devotions, we cannot expect the natural fruits and advantages of having our souls thus employed. Nor will a bare bodily service without the heart be accepted, or rewarded by our heavenly Father.

We must therefore resolve to disengage ourselves from all criminal pursuits, and from all mean passions and attachments, that we may have a capacity for the pleasures of devotion, enjoy them in some good degree here, and be prepared to enjoy them in perfection for ever. We must resolve, that our general conduct shall correspond with our Prayers; and that we will  
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not by a wicked and unrighteous behaviour affront that most holy and good being, whose favour we seek by Prayer. In short, to become thoroughly religious must be the business and delight of life ; not merely a task to which we submit, that we may avoid hell, and take shelter in heaven. Love, gratitude, dependence, hope in God, and a concern to please him, must animate our Prayers, and thence diffuse themselves through our whole temper and conduct. Then shall we know in a lower degree here the pleasure and the profit of Prayer ; and at that hastening hour, when all the hopes of the irreligious and all the profits of sin shall cease for ever, we shall experience it to have been a most wise and reasonable part that we have *served the Almighty*, and infinitely profitable that we have *prayed unto him* ; being as happy as almighty power, in conjunction with equal wisdom and goodness, can render those whom God delights to make happy.

May he bless what has been offered, to determine us all without delay to seek this inestimable felicity, and make it our own. Amen.

## S E R M O N XIII.

Of striving with our Maker.

By the Rev. Mr. BRAGGE.

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ISAIAH xlv. 9.

*Woe unto him, that striveth with his Maker.*

**I**F we duly consider the life of man since the fall, we shall find it to be one continued struggle; strife and contention, of one sort or other, run quite throughout it, and render the state of sinful nature, too truly, a state of war.

In our common intercourse with one another, what continual animosities and quarrellings, injuries and affronts, oppression and violence, slanders and false reports, disobedience in families, impatience of all sorts of government, rebellion in states and kingdoms, schisms in the church, fraud and injustice in the way of trade and business, and the like: so that a constant guard is needful, and as constant contending

tending and striving, to keep things in tolerable order, and prevent the greatest mischiefs.

In the great and most momentous affair of religion, upon which our whole happiness depends, what a domestic war do we find within our own breasts? The inclinations of the body violently drawing one way, and reason and conscience striving against them and urging the quite contrary; the great destroyer coming in to the assistance of the body, with legions of temptations and snares, and vile suggestions, and the good spirit of God aiding and strengthening the soul with pious motions and holy thoughts: reinforcing reason with grace, supplying divine arguments against sin, and exciting to an actual attention to them, and rousing conscience to a quick and wakeful sense of what is so dishonourable to God, so unbecoming the dignity of our own nature, and so exceeding base and vile; that we may vigorously resist, what in the conclusion, will certainly prove our ruin. In such a case as this, and such is the case of every man that lives, what a mighty struggle is there within us to secure our duty and our happiness! How doubtful is the fight between reason and sense, the battle sometimes inclining this way, sometimes that! How difficult do we find it to subdue our headstrong passions, and irregular appetites, and evil inclinations; to resist and overcome the tempter, and bring down every thing that exalts itself against the government of Jesus Christ! Happy are they, happy beyond expression, who are successful in this spiritual conflict;



conflict; and are so wise as vigorously to join forces with the Lord of Hosts! But woe be to him, who is of a party with the enemy, and *striveth with his Maker!* Yet this we are all, God knows, too much inclined to do; and notwithstanding all his Divine assistance, such is the pravity of fallen human nature, it is with much ado that even the best of us prevail. So strangely are we swayed by flesh and sense, that victory is never dearer bought, than when the world is vanquished by religion; and it is a victory that is but seldom gained. And what is the reason of it? Why, no other but this, and it is a strange one, that though our all depends upon it, yet so very few of us do heartily desire and endeavour to overcome; and, instead of courageously contending with the enemy, we basely betray ourselves to him, and turn against that infinitely good being, who would save and deliver us from him. 'Tis true, *if God be for us, who can be against us?* All the infernal powers will be as nothing in their attempts upon those whom he is pleased to support with his almighty arm; but then, we must not refuse his help, and resist, instead of being guided and directed by him, for then he leaves us, and we are ruined. And the very thought of his withdrawing his aid from us in this hazardous conflict should make us tremble, and importunately beg his presence and assistance, for his mercy's sake. For if it is so difficult for us to conquer, even with his help, what should we do without it? And how much misery is  
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treasured up for him, who adds God to the number of his enemies, and wages war with his Maker, who is his best and truest friend ! *Woe unto him*, says the prophet in the text, *that striveth with his Maker.*

In discoursing upon which words I shall do three things :

First, I shall shew, what it is to *strive with our Maker.*

Secondly, The extreme vileness and folly of so doing. And,

Thirdly, How miserable the consequence will be ; *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.*

First, we will consider what it is to *strive with our Maker.* And in general it is to resist his will, and oppose ourselves to his government, to contend and struggle against the dispensations of his Providence. Or, in other words, it is to refuse to do what he commands ; to repine and murmur at the circumstances he thinks fit to place us in ; to be impatient under the troubles he is pleased to lay upon us ; and to be stubborn and refractory to the conduct of his spirit, and the checks of our own consciences within us, and the guidance of his ministers without ; whom he hath appointed to watch over, and direct us, for our eternal good.

So that, first, whoever disregards the obligations religion lays upon him, and lives in direct opposition to them, minding nothing, but the gratification of the desires of the body, and of sense, without any care to please and obey his Maker ; this man does, in effect, declare, that  
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he is resolved to be no longer under God's government, but will set up for himself, and do nothing but what is good in his own eyes, and that his Maker shall have nothing at all to do with him.

God requires him to live soberly and righteously, and has given him, with the greatest wisdom and goodness, particular rules and directions, according to which he should square and govern his actions; but for all this, he hearkens to the allurements of flesh and blood, what these prompt to he eagerly pursues, and discards all thoughts of God and his duty to him, and becomes a lawless libertine. Now this is evidently to live in open rebellion against our Maker, and, as absolute and independent beings, to bid defiance to the God of heaven; and, with Pharoah, to say with scorn, *Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?* Exod. v. 2.

Secondly, To repine and murmur at the condition and circumstances we are placed in in the world, is likewise to *strive with our Maker*. For,

If God be the great disposer of all things, and allots to every one his proper station, and dispenses of the good things of this life in such a measure as his Divine Wisdom sees expedient for every one; whoever is uneasy and dissatisfied with what he has received, and thinks himself hardly dealt by, and is full of envy, and complaints; this man struggles with his Maker's Providence, as if resolved not to cease his murmurings till he had wearied God into a compliance with his desires.

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So that in this case, we have a creature contending with his Creator, about the share he should have in the distributions of his bounty.

Our great and good Creator (who having made us what we are, may certainly be supposed to know best what will be most conducive to our happiness (does graciously assure us, that upon condition of our obedience and quiet submission to his will, we shall want no manner of thing that is good for us; and we may depend upon it, that however cross and disagreeable things may appear to us at present, if we trust and rely upon him all shall conspire together for our good: and in this persuasion he would have us be easy, and rest intirely satisfied with his conduct and disposals.

But we, on the contrary, as believing ourselves to be the best judges of what will make us happy, because things do not answer our expectations, and fall out otherwise than we would have them, dislike our portion, and charge God with a partial affection, and declare, that without such and such alterations in our circumstances, we cannot be content.

So that we plainly see what discontent amounts to, namely, a most ungrateful and unbecoming dispute with our all-wise and good Creator, and most bountiful benefactor, whether he deals well and kindly with us or no; and whether we, or he knows best, what state of life is most convenient for us; and a struggle and strife between us, whose will shall be accomplished, ours or his.

Thirdly, To be impatient under what troubles and afflictions we meet with in the world, is to strive and contend with our Maker; and, in effect, to throw very vile reflections upon him.

If we believe, (as what Christian is there but does or should ?) that there is an invisible Divine Hand, that prepares and gives to us the bitter, but wholesome cup of affliction, and manages the rod which makes us smart; all impatience under it, and restless rowling of our thoughts, like the billows of a troubled sea, is no other than a direct charging of God, as if he *found occasions against us*, as Elihu expresses it, in the book of Job, and, as it were, singled us out as the unhappy objects of his unusual and unreasonable severity. 'Tis in a rage to turn again, as if injuriously dealt by; and to upbraid God with a tyrannical exercise of his power over us.

'Tis true, there are very many troubles, and very great ones too, which we bring upon ourselves, and in which Providence has no other than a permissive hand; and which, by consequence, can by no means be reasonably charged upon God: and therefore our impatience under these cannot be called a *striving with our Maker*, but is rather a just lashing of our own folly, by such reflections as are due by our past ill conduct; and is a remorse very near of kin to that which wicked spirits feel in hell. But as for those afflictions which come from God, and which may easily be distinguished from all others, our murmurings and impatience under them

them is plainly, as was said, a falling foul upon the author of our being, for barbarous cruel treatment of us ; and is just like the strugglings of a rebellious child against his parents kind corrections, and with clamorous outcries flying in his face at every stroke.

Finally, To be regardless of the checks of our own consciences, and the good motions to a better life, which we often find within us, and stubborn and refractory to the guidance of the ministers of religion ; this also is to contend and strive with our Maker.

For conscience is God's vicegerent in the soul, and by its inward chidings or applauses, gives us to understand what is pleasing or displeasing to him ; and therefore to be deaf to the reports of our consciences, and to endeavour to silence and stifle them when they would do their office, is, in effect, to resolve to be insensible to all religious obligations, and to remove far from us whatever would remind us of our duty to our Maker, as being fully purposed to go on without controul, in a course of opposition against him.

And as for the impression of holy thoughts upon our minds, by the good spirit of God ; those inward persuasives to a progressive piety which we often feel, and which are designed to excite and quicken up our sluggish religion, and enliven our dying devotion, and lead us on with spirit and vigor in the paths that will bring us to eternal life ; 'tis plain, that whoever flights and disregards them, and does not rather make



it his business to cherish and improve them, much more who endeavours to rid his mind of them with all the speed he can: 'tis plain, I say, that these men resist and grieve the holy spirit of God, and refuse their hand to that divine guide, whom their Maker and their Saviour has sent to direct and conduct them to heaven; and with brutish obstinacy resolve to go on in the way they fancy best.

And for the same reason, to be stubborn and untractable to the pious advices of the ministers of religion, and to despise their admonitions and reproofs, is really no other than to slight and disregard the directions, and oppose ourselves to the government of God himself.

St. Paul assures us, that to them the merciful God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, hath *committed the ministry of reconciliation*; so that they are *embassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by them, they pray you in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God.* 2 Cor. v. 18, &c.

Now the treatment of an ambassador is always looked upon as the treatment of the prince that sends him; and what slights, abuses, or neglects are put upon him, are resented as done to the majesty of the sovereign prince. So that lawful ministers of holy things, acting by virtue of an express commission from the King of Heaven; to refuse compliance with, and an awful obedient regard to, the messages they bring, the offers they make, and the duties they require in their great Master's name, is no other than

than to deal in the same manner by the great God himself. For *he that despiseth you, despiseth me*, (says Christ to his apostles, and their successors in the work of the ministry) *and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* Luke x. 16.

And thus much for the first particular, which was to shew, what it is to *strive with our Maker*, and who they are that do so. The next thing to be done is,

To shew, the extreme vileness and folly of so doing. But before I proceed to this, I shall make this one remark upon what has been already said, viz. that besides the vileness of any kind of wickedness and vice, upon account of its own peculiar turpitude and unreasonableness, and ill tendency, and the like, there is this superadded as the highest aggravation of it, and which leaves it utterly without excuse, that 'tis a rebellious opposition to the author of our being, a striving against and contending with our Maker, and refusing to submit to, and obey his will. And what can be pretended in excuse for this?

We are all very apt to palliate and lessen what is ill in us, and ready enough of invention for that purpose; a man that is leud and extravagant will plead heat of youth, the difficulties of religion, the strength of temptations, and will lay the blame, it may be, upon a careless education, or the ill example of those he has conversed and was brought up with; and in conclusion, will make use of the common saying, That the worst is to himself, and he is no

body's enemy but his own. The discontented will urge the hardships they undergo, under which, none can be easy that carry flesh and blood about them; and will tell you that 'tis but such and such reasonable things they desire, and which would make them happy. And those that are under affliction will say, that patience is the most difficult of all virtues, that to be easy under trouble is a contradiction, that religion is not designed to make us stupid and insensible, and who but would struggle hard to free himself from great and pressing misfortunes? And as for mens disregard to the motions of God's spirit upon their hearts, and the advices, reproofs, and guidance of his ministers, too many are apt to say, They do but as their neighbours do, and none can be perfect in this life, and they wish they could be better, and hope, that in great measure God will accept the will for the deed.

These, and the like excuses, however thin and insufficient, yet may be, and are often made use of, to lay conscience asleep; and some are so unhappy as to rest in them, as, at least, a tolerable plea.

But then, if it be urged home upon them, that the faults before mentioned, or any other sin, is a *waging war with our Maker*, and living in rebellion against him who gave us our being, and is the fountain of all our comforts; a resisting and striving against his providence and disposals who made us what we are: what can a sinful creature say to this? What colour, what shadow of an excuse can he have to offer? How



will he be for ever put to silence ; unless it be to say with Daniel, *Righteousness, O Lord, belongeth unto thee, but to me confusion of face!* Dan. ix. 7. Of such great advantage is it duly to consider, that every act of irreligion and vice (and much more every habit of it) besides what, upon other accounts, may be said against it, is a *striving with our Maker*.

II. The vileness and folly of which remains now in the second place to be considered.

And, in general, if the height of ingratitude be a vile thing ; and if to oppose and contend with our best friend, who is infinitely wiser than we are, and loves us better than we do ourselves, and whose power too is so irresistible, that after all our strugglings his pleasure shall be accomplished one way or other, if not to our happiness, as he at first intended, then to our ruin, since we are resolved to have it so ; if this be a foolish thing, then, *to strive with our Maker*, does imply all the folly and baseness that a man can possibly be guilty of.

But more particularly, *to strive with our Maker*, is a most vile and foolish thing, as it signifies,

First, Our denying obedience to his commands ; for what can be more base and vile than to refuse even our utmost services, to that infinitely glorious and good being who made us what we are ! If all our powers of acting are his gift, who has a greater right to determine how we shall act with them than he ?

And therefore, not only to refuse to do what he enjoins us, but to oppose him in every thing

we can; to commit what we know he hates, and has forbidden, and make use of the abilities he gave us, and by his gracious support still continues to us, in open defiance of him, and to his great dishonour; how base and vile is this!

'Tis God that has *made us*, in a double sense, *and not we ourselves*; not only as he was the author of our being, and out of nothing made us men, but likewise, as he is our munificent benefactor, who has raised us to those comfortable circumstances of life which we enjoy: so that he, properly, was the making of us, (as we speak) in all respects; to his goodness do we entirely owe that plenty, and those prosperous successes, which any of us have enjoyed thro' the whole course of our lives; and not only the acquisition, but the preservation of our fortunes must be ascribed to the kind care of his good providence.

But then, what bad enough can be said of those, who are so little sensible of his constant favours, as to return him nothing but ingratitude and disobedience; the most provoking slights and neglects; nay, to employ those very favours of his in an unnatural rebellion against him!

Nor is this only base to the last degree, but extreme folly too. For every command of God tends directly to our happiness; all that he enjoins is highly for our good and benefit, but not in the least for his own, whose happiness is always compleat and full, and can receive no addition; and all that he forbids is in its own  
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nature as bad as poison to us, and therefore he would restrain and keep us from it. So that to live in opposition to our Maker's will, and to throw off his government, is to resolve not to be happy, and to strive and contend for misery with all our force.

And, so strangely are we besotted, this we call liberty, not considering that at the same time we are slaves to vile unruly passions and lusts, and in the most deplorable and shameful captivity to the spirits of darkness; which the apostle thus excellently expresses in the 6th chapter to the Romans, the 16th, and following verses, *Know ye not*, says he, *after all your talk of freedom from the restraints of religion, that his servants ye are, to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?* As if he had said, Your refusing subjection to God, and living at random, as you please yourselves, at the direction of your lusts, and in compliance with the temptations of the devil, is only changing a good master for a bad one, and just like preferring slavery to a merciless tyrant, before the easy government of a wise and tender father. And this your own dear-bought experience will abundantly justify. For, *when ye were the servants of sin*, though 'tis true, you had the liberty which you desired, and were free from righteousness, yet *what fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?* Confess the truth, and say what real satisfaction you received from *striving with your Maker*, and what you gained by your rebellion against him? What but shame and disappointment, and



confusion of face, at present ; and which, without a sincere and deep repentance, will soon be followed with your utter ruin, *for the end of those things is death !*

This is a true and lively state of the matter, and will shew a sinner what egregious folly as well as baseness he is guilty of, when he denies obedience to the commands of his Maker, and will be governed by none but himself. For, in truth, he does but miserably deceive himself all the while, and is not, as he fancies, at his liberty and his own disposal, but is really, as I said before, the devil's captiv'd slave ; led about by him in chains as the wretched trophy of his conquest, and designed at last for a merciless execution. But,

Secondly, *To strive with our Maker*, is the greatest baseness and folly, as it signifies our murmuring and repining at his disposal of us, and restless discontent at the circumstances he thinks fit to place us in. For what more vile than for a poor dependent creature, whose very being is only during the good pleasure of his Maker, and who has nothing but what his bounty has afforded him ; what more base and vile than for such a wretch as this, (and all mankind are such) ungratefully to slight and undervalue the many great expressions of his goodness to him, because he complies not with all his fond desires ! Because we cannot have every thing we wish for, therefore to fret at Providence and entertain unworthy thoughts of God, and take no notice of those great blessings we have already received of him, and in the enjoy-

enjoyment of which thousands would think themselves very happy ! For can the best of us pretend to merit any thing at the hand of God ? And is not the least good thing we have, all things considered, very much above our desert ? What a strange temper then is it, and utterly to be condemned, for any one to quarrel with Providence because all his unreasonable cravings are not satisfied, when he has already much more than he deserves ?

And how egregiously foolish is it too, when an infinitely wise and powerful and good being, is so kind as to take all our affairs into his own management, and order every thing for our best advantage ; to strive and struggle till we have disengaged ourselves from him, and never be easy under any of his disposals ! Poor wretches ! Can we be so forsaken of our reason, as to think our power and wisdom greater than our Makers ? Are we yet to be taught how ignorant and weak we are, how silly in our choices, how apt to be deceived with false appearances, how shamefully out in our conduct, and almost always disappointed of our hopes ? How unreasonable therefore is it to be dissatisfied with the allotments of Providence, which are always for the best, and never at quiet because things are not managed just as our ignorance would have them ! We should rather make it our earnest prayer to God, that he would not leave us to ourselves, nor comply with any of our desires, how importunate soever, any further than he, in his infinite wisdom, sees will be most for our  
true

true interest and benefit ; and close all our addresses to him, relating to our circumstances here below, with the most intire resignation of ourselves to his all-wise and good conduct, and say, with our blessed Lord, *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Besides, what will all our murmurings and repinings, and restless strivings signify ? Truly, nothing, but to make our condition much worse than otherwise it would be, and render life a continual and most uncomfortable perplexity. For can we think that God will be directed by us, in his government of the world ? And change our own, or other circumstances, according to our own fond wishes and desires ? *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth,* (as it follows in the verse of which my text is the beginning) *but shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou ?* After all our uneasiness and discontent, God's pleasure, not ours, shall be accomplished, and 'tis happy for us that it shall be so ; and therefore nothing more foolish and unreasonable, than to be continually disquieting ourselves about things that are so utterly out of our power, and which too are infinitely better managed than they would be if they were in it.

In the next place, to be impatient under troubles and afflictions, betrays a very disingenuous temper, and likewise a great deal of folly.

The afflictions which God sees fit to bring upon us (of which only we now speak, for those we bring upon ourselves, as was hinted before,



before, have a different consideration) the afflictions which God sees fit to bring upon us, are designed either as corrections or trials; kind chastisements for our faults, or opportunities of exercising and improving our virtues; and both, in order to the increase of our future happiness. Many places of Scripture there are to this purpose, which every diligent reader must have taken notice of, one of which only I shall mention, that of the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. xii. ver. 5, &c.

*My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.*

Now this excellent reasoning shews us how kind and good, and of what happy consequence, all the methods of God's discipline are, how sharp soever at the present, if we will but suffer them to take effect; and therefore ought to be  
received

received not only with reverence and intire submission, but even with thankfulness and joy.

But then, if this be true, what can be more blameworthy than to behave ourselves with the same impatience, and restless strugglings, and outcries, and complaints, under God's salutary dispensations, as we would do under the cruel hands of a barbarous villain, or merciless executioner? If 'tis the rod of correction that makes us smart, and which is managed by a parent infinitely wise and good, and, beyond all expression, tender of our welfare, and who never strikes but when our best interest requires it of him; are we so fond of our evil destructive courses, as not to endure any thing that would cure us of them? Or do we think ourselves above such methods of reformation? Or do we believe God is mistaken, and takes wrong measures with us, such as will not answer his end?

And if the affliction is designed to rouse and exercise some sleeping virtues, to engage us in an honourable combat with our passions, and render us bright examples to the world, of faith and patience, and perfect us through sufferings; shall we refuse so great a grace, so high an honour, as indeed this is, and fret and fume, and lose all temper, as if intolerably oppressed and used inhumanly? What shameful behaviour is this! How does it betray a most vile and abject spirit, infinitely below the character of a Christian!

Nor is there less of folly in it, for is not correction better than ruin? Is not a short and light affliction here more tolerable than the never-dying

dying flames of hell? And is it not even less than nothing too, when in comparison with that eternal weight of glory, which shall hereafter crown our patience under it? Besides, will impatience mend the matter, shall we get the better of God by striving with him, and oblige him to a more agreeable treatment of us? Alas! poor impotent creatures as we are, we must submit whether we will or no! Had we not therefore better do it with a becoming ease and decency, and humble resignation, and, as we have been taught to do, both by the doctrine and example of the meek suffering Jesus! If we thus behave ourselves, our troubles will not only be highly advantageous to us, by effecting the great good work for which they were sent, but become every day more and more easy to be borne, through those supports and comforts which we shall find God's providence will send us, and that beyond our expectation. Whereas impatience, and a sturdy resistance, will only serve to make them much sharper than otherwise they would be, and turn that into pure unallayed misery, which, were we but quiet and resigned, would prove the greatest blessing of our lives.

In the last place, 'tis the greatest baseness and folly to *strive with our Maker*, as it signifies our being stubborn and refractory to the conduct of his Divine Spirit, and the guidance of his ministers, in things relating to his service and our own eternal salvation. For, in short, 'tis to resolve to be wicked without controul, that we may be miserable without remedy. 'Tis to re-

fuse



fuse to be conducted to heaven, for the sake of the pleasures of a brute; and to chuse a future hell, rather than undergo the present little uneasiness of denying the solicitations of a lust. So vile and foolish is an obstinate sinner, and like the beasts that perish.

III. I shall now very briefly shew the miserable consequence of thus *striving with our Maker*, and so conclude; *Woe unto him*, says the text, *that striveth with his Maker!*

And first, as it signifies disobedience to his commands. For who can imagine but that a Governor so wise, and so powerful, and so just as God is, will, in due time, assert his authority, and secure his laws and his government from contempt, by the condign punishment of those, who have been so hardy as to resist and rebel against him, and made no account of the plainest and most express declarations of his will. And when the Almighty shall proceed to do justice, who can withstand him, or hope to avoid the stroke, but must sink under the weight of it for ever! And that he will, at length, thus proceed to judgment, and *render to every man according to his works*, the Holy Scriptures so frequently assure us, and every Christian pretends so firmly to believe, that there is no need of saying any thing farther to prove it. And therefore, let no man feed himself with ridiculous fancies of never being called to account for his disobedience to God, as if he was too great and too happy a Being to take notice of, and punish the ill actions of such inconsiderable creatures as men are; but rather be  
assured,

assured, that he is too wise and too just a Governor to suffer rebellion in his creatures with impunity, especially when he has so often and so plainly threatened the severest punishments, to those that shall obstinately persist in doing those things he has forbidden, or neglecting due observance of what he has been pleased to command. And if love and gratitude will not persuade us to leave off *striving with our Maker*, our Redeemer, our greatest and best friend, then let the consideration of the terrors of the Divine vengeance do it: for, be assured, the contrary will be of most melancholy, most woeful consequence at last.

Nor will our discontents and murmurings at the divine disposals, which is another way, as we have shewn, of *striving with our Maker*, escape without due punishment. For suppose, and which is often done, that God should be so far provoked by our repinings as to throw us off from his care and protection, and leave us to ourselves, and, in his anger, comply with our foolish desires, and give us what we are so fond of, and which he sees will be our ruin; how sadly sensible shall we then soon be, of the vast difference between God's government and our own! How entangled with difficulties, how harrassed and perplexed, and even sinking in a bottomless ocean of sins and miseries; and whom then shall we call upon for help?

And so for impatience under troubles and afflictions, which is another instance of *striving with our Maker*; suppose our outcries and  
strugglings

strugglings and resistance, should make God withhold his paternal chastisements, and suffer sin upon us without correction, and disregard us as desperate and incorrigible; what woe on earth could befall us greater than this? This would be properly reprobation, and a kind of sealing up to eternal destruction. And therefore did a holy man \* once say, and with as great reason as devotion, “ Lord, here let me  
 “ suffer what thou pleasest, and wound and  
 “ scarrify, and even burn me here, so thou wilt  
 “ shew me mercy at the day of judgment.”

Finally, what but the extremest of all woes can be expected from our rejecting those proposals of reconciliation to God, which are not only offered but pressed upon us daily, by the ministers of Christ, and to which we are constantly moved by the workings of the spirit of God within, upon our souls; what can be the consequence of our thus striving, not only with our Maker, but our Redeemer, and Advocate with the offended Majesty of heaven; but a certain *fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour* those foolish and ungrateful *adversaries* of his, who would not be persuaded to be happy.

Having thus done with what I intended to discourse upon this subject, and shewn what it is to *strive with our Maker*, together with the vileness and folly of so doing, and how very miserable the consequence will inevitably be; let

\* St. Augustine.



them is plainly, as was said, a falling foul upon the author of our being, for barbarous cruel treatment of us; and is just like the strugglings of a rebellious child against his parents kind corrections, and with clamorous outcries flying in his face at every stroke.

Finally, To be regardless of the checks of our own consciences, and the good motions to a better life, which we often find within us, and stubborn and refractory to the guidance of the ministers of religion; this also is to contend and strive with our Maker.

For conscience is God's vicegerent in the soul, and by its inward chidings or applauses, gives us to understand what is pleasing or displeasing to him; and therefore to be deaf to the reports of our consciences, and to endeavour to silence and stifle them when they would do their office, is, in effect, to resolve to be insensible to all religious obligations, and to remove far from us whatever would remind us of our duty to our Maker, as being fully purposed to go on without controul, in a course of opposition against him.

And as for the impression of holy thoughts upon our minds, by the good spirit of God; those inward persuasives to a progressive piety which we often feel, and which are designed to excite and quicken up our sluggish religion, and enliven our dying devotion, and lead us on with spirit and vigor in the paths that will bring us to eternal life; 'tis plain, that whoever flights and disregards them, and does not rather make

it his business to cherish and improve them, much more who endeavours to rid his mind of them with all the speed he can: 'tis plain, I say, that these men resist and grieve the holy spirit of God, and refuse their hand to that divine guide, whom their Maker and their Saviour has sent to direct and conduct them to heaven; and with brutish obstinacy resolve to go on in the way they fancy best.

And for the same reason, to be stubborn and untractable to the pious advices of the ministers of religion, and to despise their admonitions and reproofs, is really no other than to slight and disregard the directions, and oppose ourselves to the government of God himself.

St. Paul assures us, that to them the merciful God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, hath *committed the ministry of reconciliation*; so that they are *ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by them, they pray you in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God.* 2 Cor. v. 18, &c.

Now the treatment of an ambassador is always looked upon as the treatment of the prince that sends him; and what slights, abuses, or neglects are put upon him, are resented as done to the majesty of the sovereign prince. So that lawful ministers of holy things, acting by virtue of an express commission from the King of Heaven; to refuse compliance with, and an awful obedient regard to, the messages they bring, the offers they make, and the duties they require in their great Master's name, is no other  
than

than to deal in the same manner by the great God himself. For *he that despiseth you, despiseth me*, (says Christ to his apostles, and their successors in the work of the ministry) *and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* Luke x. 16.

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To shew, the extreme vileness and folly of so doing. But before I proceed to this, I shall make this one remark upon what has been already said, viz. that besides the vileness of any kind of wickedness and vice, upon account of its own peculiar turpitude and unreasonableness, and ill tendency, and the like, there is this superadded as the highest aggravation of it, and which leaves it utterly without excuse, that 'tis a rebellious opposition to the author of our being, a striving against and contending with our Maker, and refusing to submit to, and obey his will. And what can be pretended in excuse for this?

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And how egregiously foolish is it too, when an infinitely wise and powerful and good being, is so kind as to take all our affairs into his own management, and order every thing for our best advantage ; to strive and struggle till we have disengaged ourselves from him, and never be easy under any of his disposals ! Poor wretches ! Can we be so forsaken of our reason, as to think our power and wisdom greater than our Makers ? Are we yet to be taught how ignorant and weak we are, how silly in our choices, how apt to be deceived with false appearances, how shamefully out in our conduct, and almost always disappointed of our hopes ? How unreasonable therefore is it to be dissatisfied with the allotments of Providence, which are always for the best, and never at quiet because things are not managed just as our ignorance would have them ! We should rather make it our earnest prayer to God, that he would not leave us to ourselves, nor comply with any of our desires, how importunate soever, any further than he, in his infinite wisdom, sees will be most for our true



true interest and benefit ; and close all our addresses to him, relating to our circumstances here below, with the most intire resignation of ourselves to his all-wise and good conduct, and say, with our blessed Lord, *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Besides, what will all our murmurings and repinings, and restless strivings signify ? Truly, nothing, but to make our condition much worse than otherwise it would be, and render life a continual and most uncomfortable perplexity. For can we think that God will be directed by us, in his government of the world ? And change our own, or other circumstances, according to our own fond wishes and desires ? *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth,* (as it follows in the verse of which my text is the beginning) *but shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou ?* After all our uneasiness and discontent, God's pleasure, not ours, shall be accomplished, and 'tis happy for us that it shall be so ; and therefore nothing more foolish and unreasonable, than to be continually disquieting ourselves about things that are so utterly out of our power, and which too are infinitely better managed than they would be if they were in it.

In the next place, to be impatient under troubles and afflictions, betrays a very disingenuous temper, and likewise a great deal of folly.

The afflictions which God sees fit to bring upon us (of which only we now speak, for those we bring upon ourselves, as was hinted before,

before, have a different consideration) the afflictions which God sees fit to bring upon us, are designed either as corrections or trials; kind chastisements for our faults, or opportunities of exercising and improving our virtues; and both, in order to the increase of our future happiness. Many places of Scripture there are to this purpose, which every diligent reader must have taken notice of, one of which only I shall mention, that of the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. xii. ver. 5, &c.

*My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.*

Now this excellent reasoning shews us how kind and good, and of what happy consequence, all the methods of God's discipline are, how sharp soever at the present, if we will but suffer them to take effect; and therefore ought to be  
received

received not only with reverence and intire submission, but even with thankfulness and joy.

But then, if this be true, what can be more blameworthy than to behave ourselves with the same impatience, and restless strugglings, and outcries, and complaints, under God's salutary dispensations, as we would do under the cruel hands of a barbarous villain, or merciless executioner? If 'tis the rod of correction that makes us smart, and which is managed by a parent infinitely wise and good, and, beyond all expression, tender of our welfare, and who never strikes but when our best interest requires it of him; are we so fond of our evil destructive courses, as not to endure any thing that would cure us of them? Or do we think ourselves above such methods of reformation? Or do we believe God is mistaken, and takes wrong measures with us, such as will not answer his end?

And if the affliction is designed to rouse and exercise some sleeping virtues, to engage us in an honourable combat with our passions, and render us bright examples to the world, of faith and patience, and perfect us through sufferings; shall we refuse so great a grace, so high an honour, as indeed this is, and fret and fume, and lose all temper, as if intolerably oppressed and used inhumanly? What shameful behaviour is this! How does it betray a most vile and abject spirit, infinitely below the character of a Christian!

Nor is there less of folly in it, for is not correction better than ruin? Is not a short and light affliction here more tolerable than the never-dying



dying flames of hell? And is it not even less than nothing too, when in comparison with that eternal weight of glory, which shall hereafter crown our patience under it? Besides, will impatience mend the matter, shall we get the better of God by striving with him, and oblige him to a more agreeable treatment of us? Alas! poor impotent creatures as we are, we must submit whether we will or no! Had we not therefore better do it with a becoming ease and decency, and humble resignation, and, as we have been taught to do, both by the doctrine and example of the meek suffering Jesus! If we thus behave ourselves, our troubles will not only be highly advantageous to us, by effecting the great good work for which they were sent, but become every day more and more easy to be borne, through those supports and comforts which we shall find God's providence will send us, and that beyond our expectation. Whereas impatience, and a sturdy resistance, will only serve to make them much sharper than otherwise they would be, and turn that into pure unallayed misery, which, were we but quiet and resigned, would prove the greatest blessing of our lives.

In the last place, 'tis the greatest baseness and folly to *strive with our Maker*, as it signifies our being stubborn and refractory to the conduct of his Divine Spirit, and the guidance of his ministers, in things relating to his service and our own eternal salvation. For, in short, 'tis to resolve to be wicked without controul, that we may be miserable without remedy. 'Tis to re-  
fuse

chuse to be conducted to heaven, for the sake of the pleasures of a brute ; and to chuse a future hell, rather than undergo the present little uneasiness of denying the solicitations of a lust. So vile and foolish is an obstinate sinner, and like the beasts that perish.

III. I shall now very briefly shew the miserable consequence of thus *striving with our Maker*, and so conclude ; *Woe unto him*, says the text, *that striveth with his Maker !*

And first, as it signifies disobedience to his commands. For who can imagine but that a Governor so wise, and so powerful, and so just as God is, will, in due time, assert his authority, and secure his laws and his government from contempt, by the condign punishment of those, who have been so hardy as to resist and rebel against him, and made no account of the plainest and most express declarations of his will. And when the Almighty shall proceed to do justice, who can withstand him, or hope to avoid the stroke, but must sink under the weight of it for ever ! And that he will, at length, thus proceed to judgment, and *render to every man according to his works*, the Holy Scriptures so frequently assure us, and every Christian pretends so firmly to believe, that there is no need of saying any thing farther to prove it. And therefore, let no man feed himself with ridiculous fancies of never being called to account for his disobedience to God, as if he was too great and too happy a Being to take notice of, and punish the ill actions of such considerable creatures as men are ; but rather be  
assured,

assured, that he is too wise and too just a Governor to suffer rebellion in his creatures with impunity, especially when he has so often and so plainly threatened the severest punishments, to those that shall obstinately persist in doing those things he has forbidden, or neglecting due observance of what he has been pleased to command. And if love and gratitude will not persuade us to leave off *striving with our Maker*, our Redeemer, our greatest and best friend, then let the consideration of the terrors of the Divine vengeance do it: for, be assured, the contrary will be of most melancholy, most woeful consequence at last.

Nor will our discontents and murmurings at the divine disposals, which is another way, as we have shewn, of *striving with our Maker*, escape without due punishment. For suppose, and which is often done, that God should be so far provoked by our repinings as to throw us off from his care and protection, and leave us to ourselves, and, in his anger, comply with our foolish desires, and give us what we are so fond of, and which he sees will be our ruin; how sadly sensible shall we then soon be, of the vast difference between God's government and our own! How entangled with difficulties, how harrassed and perplexed, and even sinking in a bottomless ocean of sins and miseries; and whom then shall we call upon for help?

And so for impatience under troubles and afflictions, which is another instance of *striving with our Maker*; suppose our outcries and  
strugglings



strugglings and resistance, should make God withhold his paternal chastisements, and suffer sin upon us without correction, and disregard us as desperate and incorrigible; what woe on earth could befall us greater than this? This would be properly reprobation, and a kind of sealing up to eternal destruction. And therefore did a holy man \* once say, and with as great reason as devotion, “ Lord, here let me  
 “ suffer what thou pleasest, and wound and  
 “ scarrify, and even burn me here, so thou wilt  
 “ shew me mercy at the day of judgment.”

Finally, what but the extremest of all woes can be expected from our rejecting those proposals of reconciliation to God, which are not only offered but pressed upon us daily, by the ministers of Christ, and to which we are constantly moved by the workings of the spirit of God within, upon our souls; what can be the consequence of our thus striving, not only with our Maker, but our Redeemer, and Advocate with the offended Majesty of heaven; but a certain *fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour* those foolish and ungrateful *adversaries* of his, who would not be persuaded to be happy.

Having thus done with what I intended to discourse upon this subject, and shewn what it is to *strive with our Maker*, together with the vileness and folly of so doing, and how very miserable the consequence will inevitably be; let

\* St. Augustine.

us beg of God so to give a blessing to what hath been delivered, that it may conduce to his glory and our eternal benefit, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ the righteous, our most blessed Lord and Saviour. To whom, &c.

## S E R M O N XIV.

Of the unchangeable Difference of  
Good and Evil.

By the Rev. Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE.

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ISAIAH V. 20.

*Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil;  
that put darknefs for light, and light for dark-  
nefs; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for  
bitter.*

THE reasonableness of religion is the great  
condemnation of sinners; and the folly  
of wickedness is most evidently reprov'd, by  
shewing it to be contrary both to the nature of  
man and to the reason of things, as well as to  
the positive will and command of God. The  
distinction of moral actions is in itself as ne-  
cessary and as manifest, as the differences of  
natural and sensible objects; and it is a greater  
and juster reproach to the understanding of a  
man,



man, not to discern these its proper objects, than 'tis a weakness and defect in the organs of the senses not to distinguish theirs. Light and darkness are so absolutely contrary to each other; and sweetness so sensibly different from bitter, that no man can mistake or confound these things, without having wholly lost the use of those senses, by which they were intended to be discerned. Pain and pleasure are so directly opposite, that nothing less than the loss of life itself can make us insensible of them, or hinder us from preferring the one, and avoiding the other. Moral good and evil, virtue and vice, the happiness and the diseases of the mind, are as truly and as widely different in their own nature, as the perceptions of our outward senses: and God has endued us with faculties of the soul as well fitted to distinguish them, as the bodily senses are to discern corporeal objects. If any man, notwithstanding this, will obstinately call evil good, and good evil, and will deny all distinction between virtue and vice; he must as much have laid aside the use of his natural reason and understanding, the judgment and discernment of his mind, as he that would confound light and darkness, must contradict his senses, and deny the evidence of his clearest sight. And when such a person falls finally into unavoidable misery and the just punishment of sin, he will no more deserve pity and compassion, than one that falls down a precipice because he would not open his eyes to discern that light, which should have guided and directed him in his way. Misery and destruction

must necessarily be the effect of neglecting those rules, on which both God and nature have made the life and happiness of the soul to depend, as certainly as the destruction of the body must be the speedy consequence of neglecting the difference between things wholesome and poisonous. And so much the more deserved and the less pitiable is the destruction of wilful and impenitent sinners, by how much the clearer the difference is between Good and Evil; and by how much the more obstinately they must shut their eyes, that they may not see the strong light of reason and conscience, the excellency and necessity of virtue, and the plain and only way to true happiness. *Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*

In the following discourse upon which words, I shall endeavour to shew, 1st, That there is originally in the very nature of things, a necessary and eternal difference between Good and Evil, between virtue and vice; which the reason of things does itself oblige men to have a constant regard to. 2dly, That God, by his supreme and absolute authority, and by express declaration of his will in Holy Scripture, has established and confirmed this original difference of things; and will support and maintain it by his immediate power and government in the world. And 3dly, I shall draw some observations from the whole, which may be of use to us in practice.

I. First,

I. First, There is originally, in the very nature of things, a necessary and eternal difference between Good and Evil, between virtue and vice; which the reason of things does itself oblige men to have a constant regard to. This is supposed in the text, by the prophet's comparing the difference between Good and Evil, to that most obvious and sensible difference of light and darkness. And 'tis not without great reason, that he supposes this difference of Good and Evil to be so plain and self-evident, as if it could not be proved by any thing more clear and manifest than itself. For in like manner as any man, who should be so absurd as to contend, that there was no difference between light and darkness, could not be confuted by any argument more strong, than the evidence of his own senses: so to any one who will perversely deny all difference between Good and Evil, it is not easy to offer any better argument, to convince him of this great and fundamental truth, than by appealing to the reason and conscience of his own mind. Not because there is any real difficulty or obscurity in the thing itself to be proved; but on the contrary, because it is so very plain and evident, that scarcely any foreign argument can by the strictest proof make it more clear and certain than it was before. When men will deny a truth, which is as evident, as the difference between light and darkness; punishment then is the only proper remedy for such obstinacy: and very justly may those men be excluded from all the benefits of human society, who will not have any regard to that difference



ference of things, on which alone all the happiness of society depends. Natural Good and Evil, in such instances wherein we are personally concerned, and where the effect is not very remote, we are always sufficiently sensible of, and abundantly able and careful to distinguish. Death and life, sickness and health, pleasure and pain, poverty and riches, honour and disgrace, are differences of condition, concerning which there is no dispute, and no danger that men will be careless or negligent. Death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and misery, men cannot but distinguish, and must of necessity always pursue the one, and endeavour to avoid the other. Yet in these very things is originally founded the difference of moral Good and Evil, which they are so apt to neglect; and 'tis only for want of attending to the issues and consequences of things, that men are ever guilty of so fatal a mistake. That which tends truly and universally to the perfection of human nature, and to the general happiness of mankind, is moral Good, as well as natural: and moral Evil is that which corrupts and depraves and dishonours our nature, and renders it truly miserable; which disquiets mens minds, and weakens their bodies; which ruins their estates, and destroys their reputation; which breaks laws and disturbs good government, and disorders and confounds the world. These respective effects are sometimes remote indeed, and at a distance; and this is that which deceives and imposes upon men: but they are nevertheless most certain, and necessary effects,  
and

and of direct, proper, and natural consequence : so that even in nature, virtue and vice, wisdom and folly, are as necessarily distinct, and as unalterable as happiness and misery themselves. God hath so constituted our nature, that the same things which truly and universally promote our happiness, are likewise the chief instances of our duty ; and the universal performance of our duty is plainly the most natural and direct means to attain true and lasting happiness. The accidents of this world, and the extreme wickedness of men, make it sometimes indeed prove otherwise for a short season : but the final event of things is always such as I have now described ; and the order of nature tends to make it be so likewise, even in all the present intermediate spaces of time. The fear and love of God, the imitation of his nature, and the obeying of his commands ; the sense of his present and future favour, who is the supreme Lord and infinitely powerful governor of the whole world ; is evidently the only foundation of solid peace and satisfaction of mind, in which a rational and immortal spirit can possibly acquiesce : piety therefore towards God, is as necessarily good in itself, and of as unchangeable obligation in nature and reason, as the Creator is of necessity infinitely superior to his creatures ; and as settled peace and satisfaction of mind, which can only arise from the sense of his favour, is necessarily the ground and condition of our happiness. Temperance and sobriety, diligence and patience, the due government of our appetites, and restraint of

our passions, are the only natural and most certain means of preserving the health of our bodies, of improving the faculties of our minds, and of keeping ourselves constantly in such temper and disposition, as is necessary to qualify us for the regular performance of all other duties of life. He that suffers himself to be deprived of his reason, either by violent passion, or by great intemperance and excess, has no guard left, that can secure him from falling into the greatest crimes. Such government of ourselves therefore, is as necessarily good and obligatory in the nature of the thing itself, as it is confessedly useful and excellent in its effects. Justice and righteousness, goodness and charity, faithfulness and truth, subjection to government, obedience to laws, due respect to authority, according to men's several qualities and stations in the world, are the only possible means of preserving the peace and welfare of the public, the order of societies, and mutual protection and support, on which depends all our happiness, all our enjoyments, and whatsoever is most valuable amongst men. These things therefore are as unchangeably wise and good, and the practice of them as indispensably enforced upon us by the eternal reason of things, and of as indispensable obligation, as it is natural and necessary for us to desire both our own private happiness, and the public welfare of mankind. Wicked and unreasonable men, who will be governed by no rule but their present appetites, look not so far before them, as to make true judgments and take right measures concerning



concerning their proper happiness. Whatever gratifies their present lust or passion, that they chuse as good and conducive to their happiness; not considering that in the course of things it may be the greatest evil in the world, either directly to themselves, or consequentially by being injurious to other men, destructive of public peace, and order, and government, and so in the end pernicious even in this present world to themselves also. For want of this consideration it is, that they confound the natural and eternal differences of things; judging of Good and Evil by no other measure, but by their own sudden passions, changeable appetites, disorderly and unreasonable lusts. If they get beyond this, and are forced to confess that the necessity of things, the very nature and constitution of the world, lest every thing should run immediately into the utmost confusion, obliges them to be under some kind of rules and restraints; yet, far from having any generous and noble principles of true virtue and goodness, they will go no further than they are compelled, nor acknowledge any other difference between Good and Evil, than what is forced upon them by the authority of law or custom. And yet concerning these also, it is as evident, that Good and Evil are things prior and superior to all human laws, and which they cannot alter; as that the difference of light and darkness does not depend upon the will and pleasure of men, and cannot be changed by them. The true and only reason of all human laws, is to enforce and secure the practice of such things, as are before  
in

in their own nature good, and useful, and profitable to society. For, if this were not the case, it would not be of any importance, whether these or the very contrary practices were enjoined by laws. 'Tis not therefore barely the force and obligation of the law, which makes a thing become good and reasonable to be practised (though in all indifferent things, this is indeed a sufficient obligation;) but 'tis the wisdom and goodness of the things themselves, that is the ground and foundation of all wise laws, and which makes it necessary, that men should by authority and by laws be compelled to do that, which if there had been no law at all, it would nevertheless have been reasonable and good for them to do. We are infinitely obliged by nature and reason, to worship God and adore, to pray and to give thanks, to the supreme Author and Preserver of our being, and to do all the good we can to men in our several stations; promoting universally the happiness of our fellow-creatures, and the peace and good order of the world. 'Tis fit the fear and authority of laws should prevent such men from opposing and hindering this great end, who perhaps would not otherwise be restrained by the obligation of right reason, or by the fear of God: but the obligation of right reason would still have been the same, though no human laws had laid any such compulsion upon men. Nay, even if it could be supposed that all positive laws and all human authority whatsoever, should require us to act the contrary part; destroy and do all evil to each other with-

out difference or respect; if all the nations in the world should conspire in having such a false notion of honour and glory, as to account it truer greatness to destroy and ruin, than to protect mankind and preserve the liberties of nations, and the common rights of human societies; yet it would neither be wise nor good, nor reasonable, neither truly great nor honourable so to do, any more than mens agreeing to call poison wholesome, would make it really be so; or the opinion or declaration of any number of men could make darkness put on the nature of light. Wicked and unreasonable men, powerful tyrants and oppressors, the greatest debauchees and pursuers of unlawful pleasures; when they are above the censure of all human laws, and have little or no reverence for those that are divine, yet often know that they do evil, and cannot deny but that it would be better to do otherwise. They are sensible that the practice of virtue and goodness, is infinitely more reasonable than debauchery and injustice; and though their lusts and passions have such dominion over them, that they cannot forbear doing unjust and unrighteous actions; yet they see at the same time a more excellent law, they know better things, and cannot but approve them as more wise and reasonable. This is a true obligation upon them to return into the ways of virtue and religion: the sense of this obligation they cannot get rid of; the uneasiness which it gives their minds they cannot shake off. 'Tis this makes them pass a severe judgment upon their own past actions,  
whenever



whenever they reflect on them ; and to chuse even the present pleasure or unjust acquisitions with difficulty and remorse. The reproach of conscience imbitters all their sinful enjoyments ; and they secretly condemn themselves, where the laws of men have no power to condemn them. The crimes they commit are a continual slavery and burden upon their minds. And were it not that evil habits and ungoverned lusts keep them by an unwilling choice in a perpetual bondage, they would infinitely rather chuse the satisfaction of being innocent, and wish always that they could separate the pleasure or profit from the crime. The actions of men that live virtuously and religiously, they cannot but approve of ; and condemn in others the very same practices, which they are guilty of themselves. They will trust a virtuous man in any business of importance, much rather than the promoters and partakers of their vices ; and desire always to have their affairs managed by men of uprightness, righteousness, and integrity. In fine, they at last wish themselves always in the place of the righteous ; and, however they have lived, yet *O that they could but die at least the death of the righteous, and that their last end might be like his ;* and thereby clearly acknowledge the excellency of virtue, its necessity in order to the public welfare of mankind, and the unchangeableness of its obligation. By all these things, the wickedest of men do themselves give testimony to the truth of this first general proposition, viz. That there is originally in the very nature of things, a necessary and eternal difference

difference between Good and Evil, virtue and vice; which the reason of things does itself oblige men to have a constant regard to.

II. Secondly, God has moreover, by his supreme and absolute authority, and by express declaration of his will in Holy Scripture, by his positive will and command, established and confirmed this original difference of things, and will support and maintain it by his immediate power and government in the world. The former proposition, viz. The natural and unchangeable difference of Good and Evil, is contained in the supposition in the text, wherein this distinction is presumed to be equally evident with that of light and darkness. The latter proposition, viz. God's interposing moreover his supreme power and authority, to confirm and support this same original difference of things, is contained in the positive declaration in the text, wherein a severe *wo* is denounced against all such as shall attempt to confound them. *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.* That such is the will of God, as well as the nature of things, may in good measure be gathered even from what we naturally know concerning him. For God being the alone Author and Creator of all things, 'tis plain their natures are respectively such as he was pleased to make them; and their relations one to another are the result of that constitution, which the Creator in his wisdom has thought fit to establish;

establish ; the nature therefore of things is the law of God ; and whatever is agreeable or disagreeable to right reason, must be so likewise to the will of the Author of Nature. Wherefore since Good and Evil, as has been already shewn, are necessarily and eternally different in the nature of things, as light and darkness are in the frame of the world, and in the judgment of our senses ; 'tis manifestly the will of God, that the one should be the rule and determiner of our moral actions, as the other is the guide and direction of our natural ones. *The light of the body is the eye*, as our Saviour himself expresses it, St. Matt. vi. 22. meaning to signify by an easy similitude, that our minds ought to be guided by reason and truth, as our bodies are by the sight of the eyes. In this respect, the light of nature itself sufficiently condemns all the workers of unrighteousness, making it appear that the practice of iniquity in every instance, is as truly and for the very same reason a direct contempt of the authority of God, as it is an absurd confounding of the natural reasons and proportions of things. The order and harmony of God's creation depends upon every creature's acting according to the law of its nature : and this law of nature to men, is, our obligation to govern ourselves by that particular understanding and knowledge, whereby we are distinguished from the inferior part of the creation ; whereby we are enabled to discern between Good and Evil ; and by which, as 'tis expressed in the book of Job, *God has taught us*  
*more*



*more than the beasts of the field, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven.* God has indued us with faculties, by which we are able to see and distinguish what will promote the welfare and happiness of the world ; and he has given us those faculties for that very end, that by distinguishing things rightly, we might direct our choice to such actions always as are most universally useful and beneficial to mankind. God himself, in his government of the world, does always what in the whole is best ; that is, what tends most to the Good of the whole creation ; and so far as we are capable of understanding his attributes and manner of acting, so far 'tis manifest we are obliged to imitate his nature, and in our several stations to conform ourselves to the likeness of so excellent an example, by the study and practice of all goodness and holiness, righteousness and truth. This is the first ground and foundation of all religion : this is that knowledge of God and of his will, which nature implants, and reason confirms, and all the wisdom in the world centers in, and all the happiness of rational creatures depends upon.

But because the vain curiosity and sceptical discourses, the vicious inclinations and unreasonable passions, the evil affections and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, have sometimes as it were raised a dust to obscure this clearest of all natural truths ; truth, concerning the necessary and eternal difference of Good and Evil ; even in like manner as certain ridiculous philosophers of old, undertook by subtil intricacies to confound the plainest differences of natural

ral and sensible things, to prove that snow was black, or, as the text expresses it, that light is the same with darkness, and bitter with sweet ; therefore God, in all the supernatural revelations he has made of his will, and most expressly in this last revelation of the gospel, has placed the sum of affairs in restoring virtue and goodness which is the image of God, and in rooting out vice in which consists the kingdom of the devil ; in ascertaining the difference of Good and Evil, and assigning to each of them their proper reward. *Wo unto them, saith he, that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ;* Is. v. 20. *that rebel against the light,* Job xxiv. 13. *that love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil ;* St. John iii. 19. This eternal difference of Good and Evil, God has now confirmed with new authority, illustrated with greater light, distinguished with plainer and clearer bounds, and enforced mens observation of this rule, with new motives and stronger obligations. For this he sent his son into the world, to be born, to live and to die for us ; that he might effectually destroy the works of the devil, and overthrow the kingdom of darkness : for this he has expressly revealed his wrath from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ; that the eternal difference of Good and Evil, when men had neglected to be moved by the voice of nature and reason, might be supported by divine authority and by God himself speaking. To this all the precepts of the gospel tend, and all our Saviour's sermons terminate  
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in it. To this all his mercies, all his patience leads; and all his judgments are intended to compel us. To this all his promises gently invite and draw us, and all his threatnings loudly command and press us. This is the end to which all other things are directed as the means. This is finally good and profitable unto men. On this depend all the blessings of the present life, and all the happiness of a future eternity.

III. I proceed in the third and last place to draw some observations from the whole, which may be of use to us in practice. And

1st, From what has been said we may observe, that religion and virtue are truly most agreeable to nature, and that vice and wickedness are of all things the most contrary to it. 'Tis naturally the part of understanding and reasonable beings, to observe the differences that are in the natures of things; and therefore if Good and Evil be naturally and necessarily different, 'tis manifest it must needs be agreeable to-nature, (unless strangely corrupted with evil habits) that men should live religiously by discerning and chusing what is good, and avoiding what is evil. Men do indeed frequently err in this matter, and are wilfully blinded by innumerable corruptions, by customs and evil habits, by pleasure and interests, by false opinions and loose practices; and then, to excuse and vindicate themselves, they take refuge in the follies of infidelity, and presumptuously call *light darkness, and darkness light*: and as a palate vitiated by a long disease, ceases to be able to di-



stinguish between sweet and bitter ; so these hardened sinners mock at all difference of Good and Evil : but still the natures of things remain unalterably what they were, and cannot but justify themselves to the reason and understanding even of those very men that unreasonably deny them. 'Tis not nature, as they weakly and falsely reproach it, but unnatural and corrupt inclinations, that lead them to wickedness. Nature and reason, as well as revelation, call upon men to be religious ; and virtue and goodness are as truly agreeable to the mind, as light is to the eyes, or sweetness to the taste. Their own consciences reproach them as often as they act otherwise ; and no worldly advantages whatsoever, no power upon earth, can ever discharge them from this obligation. Solomon had greater experience, and made more observations upon these things, than any other man that ever lived ; and the sum of all his observations is the reflection, Eccles. ii. 13. *Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.*

2dly, From what has been said, it follows, that the knowledge of the most important and fundamental doctrines of religion, must be very easy to be attained ; and that gross ignorance of our duty can by no means be innocent or excusable, our minds being as naturally fitted to understand the most necessary parts of it, as our eyes are to judge of colours, or our palate of tastes. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* To disco-

ver that we ought to fear and love, to worship and obey the great Creator of all things, the author and preserver of our beings, and the giver of all things we enjoy or hope for : to understand that justice is better than iniquity, and love and charity than violence and oppression ; doing good to mankind than conquering of nations, and preserving the world than ravaging and destroying it : to find out that temperance and sobriety is more excellent than debauchery ; and wise and reasonable counsels, than the sudden impulses of lusts and passion : these things require no great depth of knowledge, no nice and tedious disputes, nothing that can perplex or confound the understanding even of the meanest person : they are easy and obvious, plain and self-evident, and visible as the clearest day-light ; yet these are the things of the greatest importance, and which are of the highest concernment for all men to know and understand : these are the things by which the world subsists, by which alone all order and government is maintained. Men that have time and abilities may lawfully and commendably, and to very excellent purposes, study some things of greater difficulty. There is variety enough in the works of God, to employ the whole capacity of men and angels to all eternity ; there are depths and secrets in the dispensations of Providence ; there are some difficulties in some circumstances of the laws of God, and in the revelations of his will ; and these are a worthy employment for the most enlarged understandings upon earth. But the

things which are of absolute and indispensable necessity to the happiness of men, these, under the government of a just and wise and good God, it cannot be imagined but they must be universally level to the capacities of all mankind.

3dly, From hence it appears, that the judgments of God upon impenitent sinners, who obstinately disobey the most reasonable and necessary laws in the world; are true and just and righteous judgments. Had God commanded us things only in their own nature indifferent; yet even here obedience to the supreme Lord of all things would have been highly reasonable, and all creatures could not but confess his justice, if they were severely punished for disobedience to such commands. But when the supreme power and authority of God imposes scarcely any thing upon us, but what the very nature of the things themselves makes necessary, what the consciences of sinners themselves cannot but approve, as most reasonable and excellent, and what the happiness of man immediately and directly consists in, as well as the law of God makes it his duty to observe; how much more must sinners now confess before all the world the righteousness of God's judgments manifested in their destruction, if they will not by his goodness be led to repentance!

4thly, From hence we may conclude, that whatever doctrine is contrary to the nature and attributes of God, whatever is plainly unwise or wicked, whatever tends to confound the essential and eternal differences of Good and Evil,  
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every such doctrine, how plausibly soever it may be supported, must necessarily be false. By this rule the heathens might have discovered the folly of that idolatry, which taught them to worship such Gods, as they themselves had first feigned like to the most wicked men. And by the same rule, men of understanding and probity will easily condemn most of the corruptions both in doctrine and worship, which have in many places among Christians themselves crept in under a false pretence of divine revelation. And at the same time, it is a credible and excellent evidence of the truth of the pure and uncorrupted doctrine of the gospel as delivered in Scripture; that, besides the authority of miracles and prophecies, it is inwardly in the nature of the thing itself, a conformity to the Divine Nature and Attributes, a confirmation and improvement of our natural notions of Good and Evil, and of the rewards and punishments in a future state, and assurance of the reconciliation of God to repenting sinners through the mediation of Christ, and a direct promoter of the universal happiness of mankind.

Lastly, From what has been said it is certain, that every person or doctrine, which would separate religion from a holy life, and make religion to consist merely in such speculative opinions, as may be defended by an ill liver, or in such outward solemnities of worship, as may be performed by a vicious and wicked man, does greatly corrupt religion. The design and the very essence of religion, is to make men good and happy: the design of the revelation of the

gospel, is to destroy superstition, and to restore the truth of religion, by correcting mens opinions and reforming their manners, by introducing repentance, and securing to us the acceptableness of it through the merits of Christ. If without this men will pretend to be religious by any other method, they wholly mistake the nature of religion, and the design of the gospel of Christ. If they will not add to their faith virtue, but think it sufficient that they hold the truth, though it be in unrighteousness, they are like the man who, our Saviour tells us, *built his house upon the sand*: their very faith itself will but increase their guilt, and the truth which they profess, will but the more severely condemn them for being workers of iniquity. Which condemnation that we may all escape, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

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## S E R M O N    X V .

The peculiar Advantages of our Saviour's  
Doctrinē.

By the Rev. Mr. JOHN ORR.

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JOHN vii. 46.

*Never Man spake like this Man.*

THESE words were spoken of our blessed Saviour by certain officers, who had been sent by the Pharisees and chief Priests of the Jews to apprehend him ; but who, upon conversing with our Lord, and hearing some part of his doctrine, not only desisted from all attempts against him, but returned to their masters, with this extraordinary character and commendation of him, that *never man spake like him* : that they had never before heard any one deliver such wise and excellent instructions, so rational and pure a doctrine, and so apt to convince and affect the mind, as this person,



whom they supposed to be an impostor, had just now delivered to them.

It is not my intention to consider particularly what that discourse of our Saviour was, which made so great an impression on the minds of these officers; but what I propose is to take occasion from hence to speak somewhat in general concerning the excellency of that doctrine which our blessed Lord delivered to the world; to shew how truly it deserves the approbation of men, and upon what accounts it is to be preferred to the teaching of any, who appeared in the character either of philosophers, or prophets, or institutors of religion before him. After which I shall make some proper reflections upon this subject.

For evincing the great goodness and incomparable excellency of our Saviour's Doctrine, I shall first consider, what the great design proposed by it is, and whether this be not unexceptionably most worthy and good: and then shew that this most worthy and excellent design has been prosecuted and urged by our Lord by methods the most proper and effectual, and such as give his institution a great advantage above the schemes and institutions of philosophers, and all the other teachers and instructors of mankind.

First, As for the design of our Saviour's Doctrine, and the great excellency of that, it will not be necessary to use many words upon these points. Whoever looks into the gospel, will easily perceive that the great end proposed by the author of it is the reformation of men,  
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and the improving them in all virtue. \* Our Lord himself declares, that *he came to call sinners to repentance*, (Matt. ix. 13.) to correct every thing that is amiss in the tempers and manners of men, and to engage them to an universal purity both in heart and life. In another place he says that he *came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them*; (Matt. v. 17.) that he did not intend, in the religion which he was about to institute, to dissolve any of the natural and moral obligations which were laid upon men before his appearance, but that, on the contrary, he designed to confirm and reinforce these obligations, to perfect the design of the *law and the prophets*, by inculcating the doctrines of piety and virtue, and urging the practice of them in the most effectual manner upon mankind. The apostles have given us the same notion of the design of the Christian institution with that which was delivered by our Saviour himself. Thus St. Paul informs us, that *the grace of God that bringeth salvation*, by which he means the salutary Doctrine of the gospel, *hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should*

\* If any would chuse to represent the salvation of men as the end of the Christian institution, rather than their improvement in virtue; there need be no dispute about this: it is plain that our Saviour intended both, and that these ends are most strictly and inseparably connected, or rather coincident; an entire freedom from vice, and the possession of all virtuous qualities, being the very state of salvation, the highest perfection of human nature, and the certain and immediate source of its greatest happiness.

*live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) St. John declares that *the purpose of the Son of God's manifestation in the flesh*, of his doctrine and life in this world, was *that he might destroy the works of the devil*, (1 John iii. 8.) that he might remove from among men all idolatry, corruption, and vice, and that in the room thereof he might plant all virtue and goodness among them. And the apostle Peter tells us, that *God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless us in turning away every one of us from our iniquities.* Acts iii. 26. These are such clear and full declarations, as leave no room to doubt of the true intention of Christianity. Every one who impartially considers them, must be satisfied that our Saviour designed, by means of his religion, to purify and reform our nature, and to make mankind most sincerely and universally holy and virtuous. And if it should be said that besides the reformation of men, there are some other things intended by the Christian institution, such as the instructing us in certain doctrines not discoverable by reason, and the engaging us to an observance of some peculiar forms of external religion; I answer, that whatever of this sort is intended by it, is always in subordination to the establishing the practice of moral virtue among men, which is evidently the great and ultimate end of the Christian dispensation, to which every other thing in it is made subservient; and therefore we find that both the Doctrines of the gospel, and the positive rites of it, have all a practical view and tendency, and that unless the belief of its doc-  
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trines and the use of its rites be the means of influencing us to a pious and good life, they cannot be of the least significancy. *Faith without works is dead*, says St. James, *and profiteth not*. James ii. 16, 17. And from the express declaration of our Saviour, we learn, that no participation of the outward institutions and privileges of his religion will prevent our being rejected and condemned by him at last, if we have been the *workers of iniquity*. Luke xiii. 25, 26, 27.

That the purifying of the human nature, and the improving it in all virtuous qualities, is a most excellent and worthy undertaking, must be evident to every one who reflects upon it with the least attention. For besides that this discovers the most noble and generous sense of moral goodness, it at the same time confers the greatest benefits upon men, by dignifying and adorning their nature, by exalting them to the truest sublimity, and bringing them to the nearest resemblance which they can have to that glorious being, whose nature is the original and standard of all excellency, and by laying the surest foundation for their living happily in this world, and their arriving at a state of the greatest perfection and happiness in the world to come.

It must be owned indeed that this design is not peculiar to the Doctrine of our Saviour: the promoting of moral virtue is a thing so apparently good, the common nature of mankind inclines them all so much to approve of it, that  
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there has never been any institution either of philosophy or religion, that had any tolerable share of wisdom in it, which has not proposed this as its end. One of the antient moral writers tells us, that the great purpose to which philosophy was directed, was “the purifying  
“and perfecting the life of man.” And the same thing was very evidently intended by that scheme of religion which was established by Moses, and which was more fully explained and opened up by the succeeding prophets of the Jews, in whose writings we every where find, that the matters upon which that religion laid the greatest stress, were an inward purity and integrity of mind, and an outward good conversation; without which the most punctual observation of the forms and ceremonies that had been imposed upon the Jews, was not at all regarded. The superior excellency, therefore, of our Saviour’s doctrine, above that of other instructors of mankind, is not to be brought merely from the end which it has in view, which is common to his with other institutions: but that which gives his institution vastly the preference to all others, is its prosecuting the excellent end proposed by it, by means much more effectual and more likely to bring it to pass, than any that those other institutions have ever employed for accomplishing it. And this is the second point which I am to illustrate.

Though it is certain that the natural powers of men may enable them, antecedently to the discoveries of revelation, to form such a comprehensive

prehensive scheme of religion, as may be sufficient to direct and engage them to the practice of all virtue ; though several who have had no acquaintance with revelation have actually formed such a scheme, and have found the great use of it both in the government of their own lives, and in enabling them to give instructions to others for the good conduct of theirs ; yet, when we consider how few of those who had no other light than that of nature and reason to direct them, did ever form any thing like a rational and just scheme of religion, in comparison of that great multitude, who, through a natural inattention, an utter neglect of reasoning, and even an abuse of their reasonable powers, wandered perpetually in ignorance and error as to many points of great consequence, having but little more sense of religion and the obligations of virtue, than the observations which they must necessarily have made upon the frame of the universe, however slight these might have been, and the moral and social nature which God had given them unavoidably forced upon them ; and having even this corrupted and weakened by the vain and superstitious notions which they entertained, and the debauched practices in which they too freely indulged themselves : when we consider farther how the wisest men among the heathens, those who are universally allowed to have made the greatest progress in true philosophy, remained doubtful, after all their researches, of the truth of certain principles which have always a great influence upon the practice of



virtue, and are absolutely necessary for its support in many cases ; and were altogether unacquainted with some motives to it, of great efficacy, which could be discovered to men only by revelation : and when we consider, lastly, how little opportunity the philosophers had of propagating their notions, and how little able they were to inculcate them with such weight and authority, as were necessary for bearing down the prejudices, and calming the passions of men, for engaging their attention, and disposing them to receive the truth in the love of it, and to suffer it to produce its proper effects upon them : when we consider, I say, all these things, which are very well known facts, it must be evident that for bringing about any remarkably great and general reformation among men, and for raising them up to that perfection in virtue which their nature and circumstances in this world will very well admit of, some more powerful assistances were wanted than those which the light of reason and the several powers of nature, and the institutions of philosophy did afford.

And though the Jewish institution afforded some considerable helps and advantages for the practice of virtue, more than the common light of nature and the improvements of philosophy had given, by delivering very clearly many of the most important principles of religion, and urging them by an authority which was not to be disputed, and which could not but make a great impression upon the mind ; yet it is plain enough that it did not give such  
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great assistances and encouragements for this purpose, as a religious institution might have given, nor did the Jews, for the most part, after all the advantages which they had for leading holy and virtuous lives, arrive at that height of piety and goodness, to which many, by the benefit of a better institution, have since attained. This comparative weakness of the Jewish religion for making men holy and good, is frequently taken notice of in the writings of St. Paul, and will be evident to any one who only considers, among other things, that this religion had originally no other sanctions than temporal promises and threatnings, that it contained no express declarations about a future state, and give at best but some obscure hopes of spiritual and eternal blessings; and that besides this inward defect, the external pomp of it, however necessary it might have been in the circumstances of the Jews, could not but have an unhappy effect on many of them, by drawing off their attention from the things which were intrinsically worthy and good, and making them spend their time and care in an observance of some indifferent ceremonies; so that while they were very much amused and dazzled with the outward solemnity and splendor of their worship, their hearts were left uncultivated, and but little of the true fruits of piety and virtue were to be found in their conversations.

But now the institution of our Saviour has done a great deal more for the reformation of mankind,

mankind, and their advancement in virtue, than any systems of philosophy, and than any other institution of religion could ever do. It has prosecuted this noble end by the wisest and best means that have ever been proposed for effecting it, and such as, if well improved, will most certainly and easily bring it to pass. For making this appear, let us consider,

I. That the fundamental principles of piety and goodness, which the light of nature most clearly taught, which the philosophers inculcated, and which Moses and the prophets delivered in their writings, concerning the difference between moral good and evil, the nature of virtue and vice and their respective tendencies, the being and attributes of God, his providence, and government of mankind; that all these are repeated and published again in the revelation of the gospel, free from every mixture of error and superstition, and put in such a light as will be most apt to give them their full force and influence upon the mind. And this is certainly a circumstance of considerable moment: for however the evidence of these great articles is so very strong and obvious, that not only men of reflection among the heathens, but the greatest part of them have always had some belief and sense of them, yet it is certain that they were held by the generality of them, not in their genuine simplicity, but obscured and depraved by many errors and follies, which were more especially blended with their notions and reasonings about the Divine Nature  
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and perfections, concerning which they became *vain in their imaginations*, (Rom. i. 21.) and took up such monstrous opinions as were the foundation of the grossest idolatry, superstition, and immorality. And with regard even to the Jews, I think, it may be affirmed, that whatever improved notions, beyond what commonly prevailed among the Heathens, were delivered to them concerning the Supreme Being, they were not yet so clear and full as to hinder their running very easily into narrow and partial conceptions of him, as if his goodness was confined to their nation, and they were the only people in the world that he had any concern for; and as if his presence was limited to their temple, and no services would please him which were not performed there; in consequence of which, they became vain, and proud, and insolent despisers of the rest of mankind, and most groundlessly presumed on the favour of God, even while they were committing the greatest impieties. But now the doctrine of Christianity upon these first and most necessary points, is throughout rational and pure, being the sum of all the wisest apprehensions which mankind have ever had concerning them, separated from all their mistakes, and delivered with so much clearness and simplicity, that it must easily approve itself to the mind, and if digested with any care, may be the sure foundation of a worthy and good conduct; particularly, the representation which it gives us of the attributes and perfections of God, his unity and spiritual

nature, his almighty power, his infinite wisdom and supreme and universal dominion, his unlimited goodness and impartial justice, his perfect purity and inflexible regard to virtue; the representation, I say, which the gospel gives us of these divine attributes, is such as reason must immediately approve, and allow to be every way worthy of the Supreme Mind, and cannot fail to raise in all who seriously attend to it, the highest veneration, gratitude, and love towards this most adorable and excellent being, and effectually restrain them both from idolatry and superstition, keeping them stedfast in the worship of the one true God, and making them to seek his favour, only by proper and worthy methods, by innocence and an universal integrity of heart and life, which are the great qualifications that he has a respect to, and which alone can find acceptance with him.

2. There are other principles, of vast consequence, for supporting the practice of virtue, which appeared somewhat doubtful to the most considerate persons among the Heathens, and some of them even to the Jews, which are fully ascertained and put beyond all doubt by the revelation of Christianity. Such, for instance, are the great doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments; which, whatever solid foundation they may have in nature and reason, were never so clear and manifest even to the philosophers of the greatest name, but that they frequently discovered an uneasiness about the truth

truth of them, and that they wanted some stronger evidence for establishing their minds in the firm persuasion and belief of them; and which were so sparingly delivered in the sacred books of the law, that the reception which these doctrines met with, which was indeed pretty general among the Jews, especially towards the conclusion of their state, (tho' there was one numerous sect of them, which always disbelieved them) whensoever it was derived, could hardly have proceeded from any notices of them that were originally contained in their religion. But now the revelation of the *gospel hath brought life and immortality to light*, 2 Tim. i. 10. The doctrine of our Saviour hath extricated mankind from all the darkness and perplexity which they were formerly in, with regard to a future life, hath opened and enlarged their prospects beyond the grave, and given such an assurance of another world, in which mankind are to be inconceivably happy or miserable, according to their good or bad conduct here, as may make all who attend to it acquiesce in a full expectation of this other world, and remove from their minds every suspicion of its reality. Such likewise is the doctrine concerning the efficacy of repentance, which, however credible it may be upon principles of reason, and whatever strong hope or persuasion several of the Heathens had of the truth of it, seems to have been uncertain in the judgment even of some thinking men in the Pagan world, and much more in the opinion of the vulgar, if we may judge of their notions from their



practice of endeavouring to appease the wrath of God, and to procure his favour, not by the exercise of a true repentance, but by offering one sort of sacrifice after another to him, and by many superstitious ridiculous rites which were altogether impertinent and ineffectual for the purpose. But now the efficacy of repentance is one of the clearest principles in the Christian institution; the declarations of our Lord and his apostles are so express and full upon this head, that every one who believes them and knows himself to be a true penitent, must banish away all doubts and fears about his being in a state of acceptance with God, and rejoice in the sure hope of the divine forgiveness and favour. After these, I may instance in another important principle of religion, which has received a great confirmation in the institution of our Saviour, which is the doctrine of a divine assistance, accompanying the endeavours of men in virtue: of this assistance, it is certain that not only the Jews, but the Heathens had some notion and expectation; for we find the philosophers frequently hinting at it, and proposing it as a motive and encouragement to virtue; but it can hardly be supposed that any of the Heathens ever looked upon it as a thing more than probable, or which the goodness of the Deity and his love of virtue might incline him to grant to men: whereas the doctrine of our Saviour has made such a plain offer, and given such a positive promise of it, that all who seriously apply themselves to the practice of virtue, may de-

pend that they will be supported in it; that God will go along with them in all their attempts to reform themselves, and make their endeavours successful. Now whoever considers how absolutely necessary the belief of at least some of these principles is for promoting virtue among men, and the great influence which the belief of all of them must have upon the practice of it, that a full and steady persuasion of the truth of them is enough to fortify a man against all possible temptations to desert his duty, and to make him adhere to it in the most difficult circumstances: whoever, I say, considers this, must see that the institution of our Saviour, by bringing these principles out of the uncertainty in which they formerly lay, and settling them upon a sure foundation, has done a most important service to the cause of virtue, has provided much more effectually for its prevailing, and given it a vastly stronger support and establishment than any institution ever did before.

3. The religion of our Saviour has suggested some most noble and powerful motives for engaging men to virtue, which are peculiar to itself, and which the world were never acquainted with before: I mean those which arise from the infinite love of God, in sending his only-begotten Son into the world, to make a revelation of his will to mankind, to propose and declare the terms of acceptance with him, and to give us all necessary help and encouragement for coming up to these terms; and from the infinite condescension and love of our

bleſſed Saviour in taking our nature upon him, and all that he acted, taught, and ſuffered, for recovering us more effectually from our ſinful and miſerable condition, and bringing us to a ſtate of everlaſting perfection and happineſs; and from the great goodneſs of appointing the holy Spirit of God to be the ſanctifier and guide of good men, who is to reſide continually with us, to be the principle of ſpiritual life and joy in our hearts, to ſupport and comfort us in the performance of our duty: whoever attends to this new and wonderful ſcene of divine love and goodneſs towards mankind, which the goſpel has exhibited to our view, may certainly find force enough in it for filling him with all the ſentiments of the ſtrongest gratitude and love towards Almighty God, and our bleſſed Saviour, for producing in him the moſt chearful and univerſal obedience to their will, for making him to abound in all the moſt noble acts of piety, and in all the inſtances of the moſt generous and ſublime virtue.

4. The poſitive inſtitutions and external rites of Chriſtianity contribute much better to the advancement of piety and virtue, than thoſe of any other religion have ever done. Something of this ſort ſeems to be neceſſary in every religion, both for continuing and propagating the profeſſion of it, and conveying the doctrines and principles of it with a ſtronger and more lively impreſſion into the minds of men. But the rites and forms of moſt of the religions which have been ever known in the world, inſtead of ſerving the intereſt of true religion, and promoting



promoting what must be the end of that, have either had no relation to this purpose, or been unhappily the means of prejudicing and defeating it. This is notoriously true of a great part, at least, of the religious rites and customs of the Heathens, many of which were altogether foolish and ridiculous, and several of them flagrantly impious and immoral. Nor can it be denied, that the ceremonies and forms of the Jews, though originally very well intended, did always, by the multiplicity and great variety of them, too much ingross the minds, and engage the attention of that people, and came at last to shut out almost all solid piety and goodness from among them. But now the positive and ritual precepts of Christianity are but few, and require nothing but what is very simple and easy, and are all wisely framed for securing the main end of the gospel, and have the most direct and plain tendency to promote it: for what can be more proper to keep up in our minds a lively sense of virtue, and to confirm and set us forward in the practice of it, than to enter ourselves into the society of Christians, and take upon us the profession of the gospel in an open and solemn manner; to meet together at stated times in religious assemblies, for worshipping God by prayer and thanksgiving; for receiving instructions in the great duties of our religion, and having the principles and motives of it strongly and affectionately inculcated upon us; and for commemorating the death of the great founder of the gospel, and the benefits which we

obtain by his appearance in the world. These institutions are manifestly calculated for raising pious and good dispositions in the hearts of men, and we will not attend to them with judgment and true devotion, without perceiving the great benefit and use of them, in subduing our irregular desires and inclinations, in preserving us in a divine temper, and making us more expert and active in every part of our duty.

5. Lastly, the institution of the gospel is completed, and perfectly fitted for the purpose of reforming mankind by its divine sanction, or the confirmation which it receives from the miracles of our Lord and his apostles. The religion of our Saviour in this respect, stands at least upon a level with the institution of Moses, and the doctrines of all the most famous prophets of the Old Testament, and has a mighty advantage above the institutions of the antient Heathen legislators and philosophers, whose doctrines and precepts did indeed, by their own light and evidence, insinuate themselves into several inquisitive and free minds; but for want of proper methods to propagate them, and a proper authority to enforce them, could never make any progress among the main body of men. Indeed the generality of the world have naturally so much levity and inconstancy of mind, and for the most part labour under so much prejudice and corruption, that it is very difficult to fix their attention even on the most noble and important objects, and to bring them so far as to hearken to a doctrine which is perfectly

fectly pure and holy, and much more to make them heartily consent to it, and live under its power and influence ; so that whoever attempts to instruct and reform them, and would expect any great success from his endeavours, must find, if he can, some more powerful means of engaging their attention, and influencing their minds, than the wisest and justest reasoning which he can use with them, will be. Upon this account it was that the lawgivers among the Heathens endeavoured to found their institutions upon the authority of a divine commission, which they knew was a thing that would naturally strike the minds of men, and procure the greatest and most universal reverence to their instructions and orders. Now what they falsely pretended to be, and for the most part so weakly, that none of any tolerable reflection was ignorant of the deceit, our Saviour proved that he really was : he shewed himself to be a divine teacher and lawgiver, by performing, and enabling his apostles likewise to perform, such mighty works in confirmation of his doctrine and precepts, as carried the plainest marks of the interposition of heaven, and which no man could be supposed to do, *except God was with him*; (John iii. 2.) which circumstance must make a great impression on the minds of all men, and give a full conviction, if any thing at all will, even to the most prejudiced and inconsiderate, of the truth of his religion, and the obligation of his law, and of the great danger of rejecting and disobeying them ; according to that natural and  
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obvious reflection of the apostle, *How shall we escape if we neglect that great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost.* Heb. ii. 3, 4.

In this manner has our Saviour carried on and perfected the great design of his religion: thus has he laid a sure foundation for our practising all virtue, and afforded us incomparably the greatest advantages for this purpose, that were ever granted to mankind; and if his institution is not effectual to engage us to righteousness, it is hardly to be expected that any thing will be sufficient to do it. The gospel has done every thing that is requisite in a rational and moral way, for operating upon the minds of men, and determining them to virtue; and if after all they will, through a perverse and vicious disposition of heart, resist the force of its principles and motives, the same will very probably make them resist all other means that can be used for their reformation and amendment. Our Saviour indeed offers no violence to the frame of human nature; he does not by mere force compel those to live well, who are obstinately resolved upon the contrary; but he has omitted nothing, that was proper to be proposed in a wise institution, for recovering men from their sins, and exciting them to all piety and holiness: he has laid down such excellent principles, he has inculcated such strong  
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arguments, he has offered us such great assistances for engaging us to our duty, and he has confirmed all with so high an authority, that if we heartily believe his religion, and live under its influence, it will undoubtedly be the means of raising us up to the highest degrees of goodness that in this world we can attain to. The Christian religion has heretofore been very remarkable for producing all manner of virtue in those who sincerely embraced it; and more especially upon its first appearance, when it was better understood, and more firmly believed than it usually is at present, it was famous for the success which it had in raising up vast numbers from the lowest and most degenerate state, to be eminent examples of all good dispositions and actions. And there is certainly the same efficacy in our religion that ever there was for reforming the hearts and manners of men, if they be but careful to improve it, and willing to be governed by it. And if we are not reformed by it, the fault is not to be charged upon the gospel, which is an institution every way fitted for obliging men to holiness and improving them in it, but upon ourselves, who do not comply with the design of this excellent institution, nor suffer it to have its proper influence upon our minds and our conversations.

I shall now conclude with two or three reflections upon what has been discoursed.

1. The consideration of the excellent design of Christianity, and its great use and efficacy  
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for supporting the practice of all virtue, may most justly recommend it to the esteem and affection of mankind. There is certainly no man who has any nobleness and generosity of mind, and any regard to the interest of mankind, and who knows how much their happiness depends upon the purity of their hearts and the integrity and goodness of their conduct, but must heartily approve and value an institution which contributes most effectually to the reformation of the human nature, and the adorning men with all excellent and worthy qualities. The praises which have been bestowed upon the wise institutions of the ancient legislators, and the schemes of the philosophers for restraining the evil passions of mankind, and engaging them to the love and practice of virtue, are much more evidently due to the instruction of the gospel, which greatly surpasses every other institution that has been known in the plainness and simplicity of its doctrines, the certainty and efficacy of its principles, the excellency of its motives, and in every circumstance that has any influence upon the moral conduct of men. I do not say, that the excellent design and tendency of the gospel is sufficient to prove it to be strictly a divine institution; for to the making out this point, we must likewise bring in the consideration of the miracles that were wrought for the confirmation of our religion, which are a direct and solemn attestation of its divinity: but surely no one who is really a friend to the cause of virtue and  
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the interest of mankind, can ever be an enemy to Christianity, if he truly understands it, and reflects upon its most wise and useful tendency. The intrinsic goodness of the gospel, if it had nothing else to recommend it, is a just foundation for our entertaining a favourable opinion of it, and wishing all success to it in the world, that it may become the object of every man's attention, and the rule by which he directed his behaviour. And if this once becomes the temper of any one with regard to the Christian institution, we need hardly doubt but that a serious inquiry into the credibility of those extraordinary facts, which support and confirm it, will make him fully acquiesce in the belief of its truth and divine authority.

2. We should be very thankful to God for the Christian religion, and the great advantages which it gives us for leading holy and virtuous lives. It is a distinguishing instance of the divine mercy towards us, that we live under this last and most gracious dispensation of God to mankind, which has afforded them such vastly better helps for forsaking their sins and performing their duty, than were ever given to the world before ; by means of which we can attain to virtue, and the rewards of it, at a much easier rate than good men who lived under either the law of nature alone, or any former dispensation of revealed religion could have done. Our Saviour told his disciples, that the antient patriarchs, and the prophets, and other holy men under the Jewish dispensation, earnestly

neftly defired and would have greatly rejoiced in thofe clear discoveries and revelations of the counfels and will of God, and the great doctrines of religion which he made to the world ; but it pleafed God to referve them for the peculiar bleffings of thofe who have lived fince the coming of his Son, and the promulgation of the gofpel ; which was defigned to fupply the defects of all former revelations and inftitutions, and to give men the utmoft advantages that they will ever attain to in this world, for becoming holy and happy. When therefore we are partakers of thefe great benefits, we muft be extremely ftupid and infenfible if a grateful impreffion of them does not always remain upon our hearts. How fhould we rejoice in the light which fhines among us ! And how fhould our *fouls magnify the Lord, the God of our falvation, who hath vifited and redeemed us, and hath raifed up for us a mighty falvation*, (Luke i. 68, 69, 74, 75.) that we may efcape from all the fnares and temptations of our *fpiritual enemies*, and *ferve him without fear, in holinefs and righteoufnefs before him, all the days of our life*.

3. Let us be careful to *depart from iniquity*, and to abound in all virtue and holinefs. If this is ever to be expected from any men, it is certainly to be expected from the profefors of Chriftianity, who cannot indulge themfelves in the leaft degree or inftance of wickednefs, without going contrary to the whole de-

design and aim of their religion, and breaking through all the ties which can have any force upon reasonable creatures, and moral agents. Those who are in the most unhappy situation for doing their duty, who have their lot in the darkest and most corrupted parts of the world, have still so much power, and so many advantages from nature and the common dispensations of Providence for performing it, that they may be justly said to be *without excuse*, whenever they neglect it: but what then must be the case of those Christians, who, by being instructed in the doctrines and principles of the gospel, have had all the opportunities and advantages, as well as obligations that any men can have, for becoming good and virtuous, and notwithstanding continue impenitent and wicked? They are plainly the most guilty and inexcusable of all men, and discover such a strong bent to vice, a heart so thoroughly possessed with the love of it, and so entirely under its dominion, as must render them most hateful in the sight both of God and man. If we would in any sort answer the obligations which Christianity hath laid upon us, and make a proper improvement of the helps which it affords us for the practice of virtue, we shall not only keep ourselves innocent and free from every prevailing sin, but endeavour to become remarkable for all good qualities; we shall not content ourselves with any small attainments in virtue, but be always forming ourselves  
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upon the example of Almighty God, and be in a continual progress towards the perfection of goodness: we shall consider ourselves as designed, according to our Saviour's similitude, to be the *light of the world*; (Matth. v. 14.) as persons who are to diffuse an enlivening and salutary influence, and set a bright pattern to all around us; who are to adorn religion, and recommend it by our conduct to the approbation and love of mankind. This will be *to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called*, (Eph. iv. 1.) and *to have our conversation such as becometh the gospel of Christ*; (Phil. i. 27.) to make our practice bear a conformity to our notions, and the principles by which we profess to be governed. And this is the only way in which we can make our profession of Christianity turn to any valuable account to us. When our character of Christians is no more than a name, it may indeed serve for a mark of distinction, and furnish us with matter of talk and disputation, and perhaps sometimes be useful in promoting some low worldly designs; but except it be accompanied with a proportionable behaviour, it will be so far from advancing our spiritual interest, and increasing our future happiness, that with regard to these we must suffer very greatly upon the account of it, according to that most equitable and impartial rule of divine judgment, *To whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required*; (Luke xii. 47, 48.) in consequence  
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of which we are told, that *the servant who knows the will of his Lord, and prepareth not himself, neither doth according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

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# S E R M O N XVI.

The Tendency of Christianity to promote the Happiness of Mankind in this present Life.

By the Rev. Mr. ORR.

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LUKE ix. 56.

*For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*

**T**HE occasion of our Saviour's making this declaration, concerning the design of his coming into the world, was this. As he was passing through the country of the Samaritans, in his way to Jerusalem, he sent some messengers before him into one of their villages, to provide an entertainment for himself and his attendants; but the inhabitants knowing him to be a Jew, and that he was going to worship at Jerusalem, from the rooted enmity and hatred



tred which they had to that whole nation, on account of some religious differences, refused to receive and entertain him. This uncivil and inhuman treatment of such an excellent person, so inflamed the spirits of James and John, two of our Lord's disciples, that they wanted nothing but his consent, to inflict a most severe and exemplary punishment on the wretches who had dared to use him so unworthily and basely. *Lord, said they, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?* The action of Elijah which is here referred to, is particularly related, 2 Kings chap. i. But notwithstanding the zeal which the disciples discovered in this motion for the honour of their master, and notwithstanding they endeavoured to justify it by the authority and example of Elijah, our Saviour was so far from approving it, that he rejected it with the utmost indignation and abhorrence. *He turned quickly upon them, and rebuked them, saying, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* As if he had said, "Ye do not consider  
" what a vile and wicked spirit that must be,  
" which dictates so much inhumanity and  
" cruelty to you, and how impossible it is for  
" me to comply with your proposal, since it is  
" utterly irreconcilable with the end of my  
" appearing in the world, which is not to do  
" the least harm to mankind, but, on the con-  
" trary, to do them all possible good; not only  
" to confer eternal salvation upon them in

“ another world, but to consult their present  
 “ welfare and happiness in this ; to establish  
 “ human society in peace and good order, and  
 “ to contribute to the security, comfort, and  
 “ true enjoyment of life.” This every one will  
 perceive to be our Saviour’s meaning, who con-  
 sidered that he here speaks of his coming to *save*  
*men’s lives*, in opposition to that destruction  
 which his disciples intended to bring upon  
 them, which was to have its effect in this pre-  
 sent world.

Now this declaration of our Lord deserves to  
 be well considered by us, and will afford us  
 some very useful lessons and instructions : but  
 before I come to take notice of these, I shall  
 first illustrate and confirm the truth of what our  
 Saviour has here asserted, or shew that he really  
 came to consult the happiness of mankind in this  
 present world, and that he has laid a very firm  
 foundation for securing and promoting it.

Before I enter upon the proof of this point,  
 I shall make this one observation ; that it might  
 very justly be expected, when our Saviour ap-  
 peared as a divine messenger, and the institutor  
 of a religion which was to be propagated among  
 all nations, that he would have a particular re-  
 gard to the peace of the world, and make the  
 advancement of it one principal part of his  
 concern. It is not to be supposed, that Al-  
 mighty God, who created men out of pure  
 goodness, and who preserves them in being,  
 that he may communicate to them the effects  
 of his benignity ; who has made them with  
 capacities and desires of happiness in this, as  
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well as in a future state, and has so united them together, both by the necessity of their condition, and the social dispositions of their hearts, that they must mutually contribute to one another's support and welfare ; it is not, I say, to be supposed that he would send a person into the world, to deliver in his name, a law or rule of life to mankind, which would take no care of them and their interests : it may very well be presumed that such an institution would be chiefly intended for promoting their happiness, and that while it effectually secured their greatest and most extensive happiness in another world, it would likewise provide for that part of it which may be enjoyed by them in this. The natural apprehensions which we have of the Deity, lead us very obviously to conclude, that this must be the design of every revelation and institution of religion which proceeds from him ; and indeed without this design it would not be possible for any revelation to engage the attention and favour of mankind.

Accordingly, when our Lord appeared in the character of a prophet sent by God, he had this qualification, which would be naturally expected in him, and which was necessary to his insinuating himself into the favour of men, a kind and beneficent intention : he soon made it appear that the policy of this world was not the spring of his conduct ; that he came not to promote any selfish ends and interests of his own, but that his design was noble and generous, and entirely friendly to mankind ; not only to prepare them for a state of immortality in another world, and to confirm them in the joyful



hope of it ; but to render their condition here easy and agreeable, to make pleasure to flow in every heart, to diffuse a spirit of peace, harmony, and love through human society, and to establish the world a scene of constant serenity and delight, so far as the present constitution and order of things will permit it to be so. This was the true design of our Saviour's appearing, and the business which he sincerely prosecuted while he conversed upon earth ; as will fully appear from considering,

I. The nature and tendency of that religion which he has instituted.

II. The example which he has proposed to the imitation of all his followers.

I. Let us consider the nature and tendency of the Christian institution. Whoever reflects upon this, must soon perceive it to be perfectly well calculated for promoting the present interest of men, and making the societies of the world flourish and prosper. To shew how truly Christianity is adapted to this purpose, let us consider what the things are, on which the happiness of particular men, and that of society chiefly depend. It must be evident to every one upon the least reflection, that the greatest part of his private happiness arises from a virtuous temper and state of mind, and a course of actions agreeable to it ; from the dispositions of reverence, love, gratitude, and submission to the great Author and Governor of all things, and trust in his providence : from humanity, justice, and kindness to men ; from the moderation of all the appetites and passions  
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of the soul, and the keeping them in subjection to the directions of reason and conscience. Whoever attends to the several sorts of pleasant perceptions that he enjoys, will acknowledge, if he speaks ingenuously, that the pleasures which he receives from the exercise of these good dispositions and affections, are by far the most noble and satisfying of any with which he is acquainted; that they affect him in the most lively manner, and are steady and permanent in their nature, and of constant use to support and revive him in any misfortune and adversities which may happen to him in the world; besides that they are usually attended with the other most valuable comforts and pleasures of life. It is likewise evident that the greatest happiness of society proceeds from the virtue and good conduct of men; particularly from their being well-affected towards the public, and employing the several talents, powers, and advantages which they may be possessed of, for promoting the common good; from the magistrates framing and executing wise and righteous laws, and the subjects paying a just respect to lawful authority, and contributing cheerfully to the necessary support of the government and constitution; from the diligence and industry of men in the business of an honest calling, from their observing the maxims of truth, justice, meekness, compassion and charity, in their conversation and dealings with one another, and their performing readily all the social and reative duties of life. Both reason and experience

assure us, that these are the things from whence the public happiness directly and immediately flows, and that they will never fail to make a society flourish in prosperity and glory. Now when this is considered, it will be very easy to shew the Tendency of the Christian religion to promote the present Happiness of men, and the peace and welfare of this world. For let any one read the gospel with the least attention and impartiality, and he must needs see that the great design and business of it is to press and inculcate all those virtues which are the sources both of private and public happiness ; that it strictly enjoins all the branches of piety towards God, an awful veneration of his majesty, strong love and gratitude for his mercies, perfect resignation to his will, and a firm confidence in his power and goodness : that it indispensably requires an exact performance of all the duties of justice, faithfulness, compassion, and goodness towards men, and will not allow us to gratify our private desires and inclinations in any instances to the prejudice and detriment of others ; that it insists particularly upon those duties and virtues, the practice of which affects the order and happiness of the public ; requiring magistrates to provide for the safety and welfare of the communities in which they govern, by a steady and impartial administration of justice ; and subjects to honour and obey magistrates as persons set over them for their good, and to support and assist them in the just execution of their offices, and in maintaining the



harmony and order of society ; commanding all men to fulfil the duties of their several relations ; to be laborious and diligent in their callings, that instead of being burthensome to the community, they may have wherewithal to communicate to the necessities of the indigent members of it ; to be perfectly honest, true, and equitable in all their commerce and intercourse in the world, to cultivate a spirit of harmony, meekness, forgiveness, condescension, and universal benevolence ; not to confine their good-will to any one party or denomination, but *to do good, as they have opportunity, to all* ; and to be ready to sacrifice every private interest, even life itself, for the common benefit and interest of their brethren. This is the constant strain and tenor of our holy religion ; these are the things which it inculcates most affectionately and earnestly upon us, and on which it lays the greatest stress ; assuring us that they are essential to true religion, the very life and end of it, and the marks by which we shall be known to be Christians ; that they are the most acceptable services that we can possibly offer to Almighty God, and far more pleasing to him than any of the instituted parts of his own worship ; and that they must be performed by us as ever we would answer the obligations which the infinite love of God, and of our blessed Saviour hath laid upon us, and as ever we would be entituled to the favour of God and the happiness of another world. This is what every one who looks into the New Testament, must know to be a just account of the  
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nature and design of the Christian religion; and consequently, that it is entirely contrived for the benefit of the world; that it has the plainest Tendency to promote the Happiness, both of every man considered particularly in himself, and of all men in general as united together in society. Indeed the gospel is so apparently calculated for raising and cherishing a spirit of universal love and goodness in mankind; it abounds so much in precepts, exhortations, and motives to the exercise of patience, temperance, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness, charity, and such virtues as contribute most immediately and effectually to the peace and prosperity of the world, that some have accused it upon this very score, as if by insisting so much upon these virtues, it dispirited and infeeble the minds of men, and rendered them incapable of great and heroick actions: this objection might certainly be shewn to stand upon a very false foundation, were it necessary here to enter into a confutation of it; but all that I intend by mentioning it, is only to observe that even in the judgment of those who bear no good-will to Christianity, it appears to be a most good-natured and benevolent institution, which intends to calm and soften the passions and tempers of men, to remove every fierce and cruel quality out of their nature, and to make them all mild and gentle, peaceable and kind, and to take pleasure in nothing so much as in promoting one another's happiness.

II. It will farther appear that our Saviour designed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind

mankind in this present world, from considering that example which he has proposed to the imitation of his followers. It must be evident to any one who considers the life of our blessed Lord, as described in the history of the gospel, that he was not only innocent and inoffensive, but most useful and beneficent in his conversation; that he acquitted himself perfectly well as a member of society, and a citizen of the world. His behaviour was, in this respect, entirely conformable to the doctrine which he delivered, being full of obedience and submission to the just orders of the government under which he lived, and of justice, meekness, patience, forbearance, compassion, and charity to all mankind: our Saviour was particularly careful to give no offence to the governing powers, and did indeed more than was strictly incumbent on him to approve himself a peaceable and good subject; as is plain in the case of his working a miracle for the payment of certain tribute-money, to which he was not liable. And as to his ordinary conduct in life, nothing could be more patient and forgiving, more gentle and condescending, more full of humanity and goodness, than it was. Though our Lord was exposed to all sorts of evil treatment, and was more abused and injured than any person that ever was in the world, yet he never discovered any thing of a malicious or revengeful disposition; he had indeed a very lively sense of the indignities and abuses which were offered to him; but he never *rendered evil for evil, or railing for railing*: on the contrary, he expressed



expressed the greatest good-will to his enemies, by endeavouring to correct their tempers and reclaim them from their wickedness, and by praying heartily to God for their forgiveness. Though he was in such poor and mean circumstances in the world, that it was not possible for him, in a natural and human way, to relieve the outward distresses of the miserable objects that he every where met with, yet he failed not to make use of his divine power for supplying this deficiency, and was daily employed in working miracles for feeding the hungry, for opening the eyes of the blind, for restoring strength to the lame, and a power of hearing and speaking to the deaf and dumb, and for healing all sort of sickness and infirmities among the people: besides that he imparted more valuable blessings than any relating to the body, to all who attended upon him, wise instructions, discreet and free reproofs, and earnest persuasives to every thing that has a tendency to make the mind happy both in this, and in a future state. In these good works our Lord continually employed himself from the time of his appearing publickly in the world; and in them he took so much delight, that not all the ungrateful usage which he met with, nor the perverse constructions which were put upon his most generous and useful actions, nor all the hatred, rage, and persecution which he foresaw, his persevering in his good designs would unavoidably draw upon him, could divert him from them: notwithstanding these great discouragements and hindrances to the exercise  
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of benevolence, our blessed Saviour, according to the glorious character which one of the sacred historians gives of him, *went about doing good*, (Acts x. 38.) seeking for opportunities of conferring his benefits, and readily laying hold on all that offered. This was the conduct of the founder of our religion; this is the pattern which he has proposed to his disciples, and which he has obliged them all to follow, telling them, *that he had given them an example, that they should do as he had done*, (John xiii. 13.) *that they must learn of him who was meek and lowly in heart*, (Matth. xi. 29.) and *that they must love one another as he has loved them*. John xiii. 34. And from hence it is most evident that our Lord did truly consult the peace and welfare of this world, since he not only made the promoting them the constant concern and business of his life, but has engaged his followers to make it the business of their lives also, by the influence of his amiable example.

Having thus sufficiently illustrated the truth of our Saviour's assertion, concerning his coming to promote the welfare and happiness of this world, I proceed now to draw some useful lessons and inferences from what has been discoursed.

1. We may see what great reason there is for approving and valuing the Christian religion, which is so entirely calculated for the benefit and interest of the world. Great is the difference between the religion of our Saviour, and the religions which prevail in many places of the world, which instead of contributing to  
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the ease and comfort of their professors, engage them to the observance of many burthensome superstitions, and fill their minds with tormenting passions, and disquieting fears; and which, instead of promoting the public good, tend to the desolation of countries, and to the introducing great confusion and misery into civil society: this is too plainly the tendency of most of the false religions which are at this day admitted in the world; which consideration must certainly make these religions the aversion of every wise and good man. Nothing like this can be objected against the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, which is altogether *pure and peaceable*, (James iii. 17.) and has the kindest influence on the affairs of mankind and of society; which intends to subdue all those evil appetites and passions, from whence the greatest part both of the private uneasinesses, and public confusions and disturbances which are in the world proceed, and to form such a strong temper of goodness in men, as must produce a great deal of pleasure, not only to the persons who possess it, but to all to whom their influence may extend; and which, if the end of it were but sincerely and universally complied with, would settle and confirm the whole world in a state of universal justice, peace, love, and happiness. This is the true design and tendency of our religion, which may very justly recommend it to the approbation and favour of the world: it is indeed unaccountable that any who are really friends to the cause of virtue, and the interests of mankind, should ever oppose an institution,



stitution, the great design of which is so evidently benevolent and useful: though the intrinsic goodness of Christianity is not sufficient to prove it to be properly an institution from heaven, yet this may, at least, incline men to entertain a favourable opinion of it, and to wish well to it; this may prevent their taking up any groundless prejudices against it, and much more their using any dishonest arts, which yet have sometimes been used, for overthrowing it: this consideration may rather prepossess them in favour of the gospel, and make them wish to see the truth and divinity of it made out to the conviction of every one, and to encourage all men to receive it, and to form their conduct according to its directions. Thus it may be thought that we shall be affected with respect to the Christian religion, upon a bare view of its excellent nature and beneficial tendency: not that we are to look upon Christianity only as a useful scheme of philosophy, or merely as the institution of a man, who intended to do good in the world, which is all the account that some persons are willing to make of it; for besides its containing a most pure and benevolent doctrine, which to a well-disposed mind must be its great commendation, it has moreover been confirmed by such extraordinary works, as sufficiently declare it to be of a heavenly and divine original. The evidence for this is so clear and full, that it will hardly fail to satisfy all men who examine it with due attention and impartiality, and determine them

to embrace the gospel, not only as containing wise instructions for the good conduct of life, but as a law enjoined upon them by the highest and most unquestionable authority.

2. It follows from what has been said, that the confusions and mischiefs which Christianity has occasioned in the world, and the ambitious and factious designs which have been carried on under the cover of it, are not to be charged as natural consequences from it, or any principle which it contains. It is certain, that the holy and benevolent institution of the gospel, has not universally produced its true and proper effects in the minds of men: it is far from having been always the means of subduing the fierceness of their tempers, of reconciling their differences, and uniting them in the bonds of friendship, charity, and peace: it has often proved, on the contrary, the occasion of the bitterest hatreds and animosities, and of filling the world with all the deadly effects of party-rage, violence, and cruelty. It would be an unnecessary, as it is an ungrateful work, to reckon up the persecutions and barbarities, even of Christians against Christians, upon pretence of defending their common religion, or something which has been thought to relate to it; many instances of which have been extremely horrid and shocking, not only inconsistent with the most obvious design of the gospel, but with all the principles of natural justice and humanity. These are things which are very well known,  
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both to the friends and adversaries of the Christian religion ; and indeed there are too many instances of them to be observed in almost every country, where this religion is professed at this very day. It was with respect to these events that our Lord declared that he *came not to send peace upon earth, but a sword*; (Matth. x. 34.) that is, that the consequence of his appearing in the world, would not be the establishment of that universal quiet and harmony which his religion was intended to introduce; but that this very religion, which is so meek and charitable, would often, by the perverse humours and passions of mankind, be turned into an engine of the greatest strifes, divisions, and cruelties. But whatever the distractions and miseries which have happened in the world upon occasion of Christianity's coming into it may have been, it is certain, that the guilt of them can never be justly fixed upon it; they are none of its fruits or productions, nor is it any more to be blamed for them, than philosophy, civil government, or any of the most wise and useful institutions of men, are to be blamed for the evils, to which, contrary to their own design and tendency, they have been made subservient. If there was any thing in the nature of the Christian institution which led to confusion, or to disturb and imbroil mankind, it would be meet that it should bear the reproach of it; but when nothing like this can be pretended, when just the reverse of it is true, when every

VOL. I. X thing



thing in the gospel conspires most evidently to the general peace and happiness of the world, surely none who judge equitably, and as they would judge in cases exactly parallel, will ever condemn the religion of our Saviour, only for its being used as a cover to such persecutions, cruelties, and inhumanities, as are utterly repugnant to the whole nature and design of it. With those who thoroughly consider things, it will perhaps be an argument in favour of the gospel, that men have been always so willing to draw it in, for sheltering designs which they knew they could not well accomplish without the influence of its name and authority; but none can justly accuse it, only because it has been abused, and made the instrument of promoting projects, which above all things it condemns and abhors.

3. From what has been discoursed we may learn how utterly irreconcilable with Christianity all those doctrines and principles are, which are prejudicial to the interests of mankind, which tend either to destroy, or lessen the happiness of human society. And of this sort of doctrines there have been, and are too many received among almost all professions of Christians, and more especially among those of the church of Rome, to the great reproach of the gospel, and infinite prejudice and harm of the world. Such, for instance, is the doctrine which teaches men, under the notion of following a stricter course of piety, and leading a more sublime and spiritual life, to withdraw

from the world, and all the common concerns of life, and to give themselves up entirely to the exercises of meditation, reading, and devotion; the consequence of which has been the rendering vast multitudes of people, not only insignificant, and useless, but very expensive and burthenfome to society. Of the same kind more notoriously is the doctrine of propagating religion by external force, which has been often put in practice, not only to the laying some negative discouragements and smaller hardships upon men, but to the subversion of all their most important privileges and rights; to the violation of all the order and peace of the public, to the committing of the most horrid outrages and cruelties, and the turning whole countries into *fields of blood*. And of the same nature and tendency are the doctrines concerning the supremacy of the Pope, and the privileges which belong to him even in the highest temporal matters, the deposing of princes, the giving away their dominions, and absolving subjects from their allegiance; and the spiritual powers which he and other ecclesiastical persons have pretended to, of shutting up and opening the kingdom of heaven, of binding and loosing, and of retaining and remitting sins authoritatively; which, according to their genuine and true meaning, amount to nothing less than the putting men into a state of salvation, or damnation, as they please: which doctrines have likewise been the source of great commotions, confusions, and calamities, in many nations.

These pernicious tenets are quite the reverse of the righteous and merciful principles of the gospel, and so far as they take effect, entirely destructive of the design of it: nothing therefore can be more grossly absurd and shamefully inexcusable, than for any to embrace and act agreeably to such doctrines, and at the same time to make a profession of the Christian religion. The persons who do this, may pretend, if they please, a more than ordinary zeal for religion; or they may appropriate it to themselves, and allow no share of it to any others, which is what they of the church of Rome do; but while they act in such direct opposition to the great and evident design of the gospel, every one of the least consideration must see the vile hypocrisy and impudence of their pretences, and that the spirit which really actuates them, is as different as can be from any thing which could be infused into them by Christianity.

4. Lastly, From what has been said, we may see how much it should be the concern and business of every one of us to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, and to do good in the world. This is a thing which the instincts and suggestions of nature incline us to, and it is what religion most firmly binds upon us: indeed the only way of approving ourselves sincere and good Christians, is to cultivate a temper of universal justice, meekness, and benevolence, and to lay out ourselves to be as useful as our capacities and stations will admit of. There are some, I know, who imagine that they can sufficiently discharge the obligations, which religion



ligion lays upon them with respect to mankind, by being barely just and honest, and abstaining from all positive wrongs and injuries; or that they can, perhaps, attain to the end of religion, without practising any moral and social virtues at all, looking upon certain points of faith, and **a great zeal** in defending these, and a **punctual attendance** upon the external forms and institutions of devotion, as the only things of moment, and as the very height and perfection of Christianity. But these are such gross mistakes, that it is hardly to be supposed that men can fall into them, without at least a very criminal negligence and inattention. According to the most obvious notions, which both reason and revelation give us of religion, it is intended for the benefit of the world, for making mankind live so, as to be both happy in themselves, and kind and beneficent to one another; and this effect it will certainly produce in us, if we duly attend to it, and are governed by its authority.

## S E R M O N    X V I I .

The Inexcusableness of rejecting the Gospel.

[*Preached on Whitfunday.*]

By Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE.

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H E B . ii . 3 , 4 .

*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will?*

**T**H E S E words contain an account, how utterly inexcusable all men are, who neglect the salvation of the gospel: either by rejecting it through unbelief, when offered unto them,

them, or by living unworthily of it, after they have pretended to embrace it. Many considerations there are, which highly aggravate the fault of such persons as contemptuously neglect the proposal of a favour, which 'tis both their duty and their greatest interest to accept; and many circumstances make them more and more inexcusable, and justly to deserve the severest punishment, for their ingratitude and contempt. The intrinsic goodness and excellency of the thing itself, which they despise and neglect; the great value, the necessity, and singular importance of it; the exceeding great benefit, which, by being duly received, it would bring along with it, and the extreme evils which are consequent upon the neglect of it: the power and authority, the greatness and goodness of the person, whose favour we make light of; our subjection to him and dependence upon him, as our absolute Governor; or our obligations to him, as our greatest benefactor: the dignity and excellency of the person, by whose interposition the benefit is procured, and by whom it is conveyed or sent to us: the great difficulties that were necessary to be undergone in order to obtain it, or the great cost that was requisite to purchase it; the strength and clearness of the evidence, and the number and greatness of the proofs, made use of to assure us of the certainty of it: all these are circumstances which greatly increase our obligation, to accept with thankfulness the advantage proposed, to make that due use of it for which it was conferred, and be influenced by it in all the



actions of our lives. And if we neglect or despise it, or behave ourselves ill or unworthily under it, all the same circumstances do highly aggravate our guilt, render us very inexcusable, and make us justly to deserve the severest of punishments for our ingratitude and contempt. To reject that, which in the nature of the thing itself, is of the highest excellency and intrinsic goodness, is a mark of the greatest depravity and corruption of manners. To despise that, which is of the last and utmost importance to us; on the due receiving, or on the neglecting whereof, depends the greatest happiness or the extremest misery our nature is capable of; is the greatest folly and stupidity imaginable. To disobey the commands of our Supreme Governor, whose power is absolute, and his authority uncontrollable, is the highest insolence; and to oppose the will of our greatest benefactor, is the basest ingratitude: to slight and reject a gracious proposal of mercy, procured for us by the interposition, and conveyed to us by the hands, of a person of the greatest dignity and excellency, and who was likewise, in order thereunto, necessarily to condescend and submit to undergo great sufferings and indignities, is the highest degree of perverseness possible. And to withstand and not be convinced by such proofs, as both in number, strength, and clearness, are the best and greatest evidence that can be expected or in reason desired, is the utmost obstinacy, and most inexcusable and wilful opposition to truth. Now all these aggravating circumstances attend the rejecting,

rejecting, or (which is the very same thing) the disobeying the gospel ; and they are most of them contained in these words of the apostle, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?* In the words,

1st, Here is the intrinsic goodnes and excellency of the thing itself, which wicked men reject, intimated as a just ground why they should not escape unpunished. It is in itself or in its own nature a *great salvation* ; a salvation from sin and misery, from the power and tyranny of the devil, and from the punishment of death.

2dly, Here is a great aggravation of the sin of rejecting the gospel, in that it is a salvation not only great in itself, but also offered unto us by expresse revelation from God himself.

3dly, Here is the dignity and excellency of the person, by and through whom this salvation is proposed to us ; mentioned as a farther aggravation of the sin of rejecting it. It was *at the first begun to be spoken by the Lord*.

4thly, and lastly, The strength and clearness of the evidence, and the number and greatness of the proofs, made use of to assure us of the truth and certainty of the gospel, is of all others the highest aggravation of the guilt of those who neglect or disobey it ; and that which  
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of all other circumstances renders them the most utterly inexcusable : *God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.* The principal and most remarkable of all which signs and wonders, being that plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, which we this day commemorate ; I shall therefore be very brief upon all the former heads.

1st, Here is the intrinsick goodness and excellency of the thing itself, which wicked men reject ; intimated as a just ground why they should not escape unpunished. It is in itself a *great salvation* ; a salvation from sin and misery, from the power and tyranny of the devil, and from the punishment of death. Sin, in its own nature, even separate from the consideration of its being an obstinate disobeying the revealed will of God, is in itself utterly unreasonable and inexcusable : 'tis acting in opposition to the known reason and proportion of things ; contrary to that eternal order and equity, which God has established in the original constitution of nature ; opposite to the light of reason, the dictates of conscience, the unprejudiced judgment of our own minds, the agreeing opinion of all wise and good men, nay and even of bad men themselves too ; contrary to all our natural notions and apprehensions of the attributes and will of God ; destructive to the public welfare and happiness of mankind, the health of our own bodies, the peace of

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our minds, and the support of our good name and reputation amongst wise and reasonable men: 'tis a subjecting our reason to vile affections, to inordinate and brutish appetites, to disorderly and ungoverned passions; which is the greatest and the worst slavery in the world; to see and approve what is good, and yet not be able to prevail with ourselves to practise it; to be sensible of the destructive consequences of sin, and yet, through the strength of evil habits, continue under the power and dominion of it; to feel ourselves deprived of our present happiness, and of our best hopes of all that is to come, and yet continue in the practice of such vices, as are the only causes of all this misery: this is evidently the greatest misery, and most slavish bondage that can be. Now to have a way proposed to us, of being delivered from this body of sin, into the glorious liberty of the children of God; to have a method laid before us, of being rescued from this misery, and put into a way of securing both our present happiness and that which is to come: this is the offer of a *great salvation*; this whoever shall neglect, is absolutely inexcusable, and justly deserves to fall into that misery, from which he would not accept a deliverance. The light of nature itself directs us thus far, and that which all true philosophy pretended to, was to convince men of the reasonableness and necessity of endeavouring, by all the helps of reason and natural religion, to deliver themselves from this bondage and slavery of sin. The gospel proposes to us an infinitely

infinitely more effectual way of obtaining this end, than any philosophy under the light of nature was ever able to do ; shewing us most clearly the heinous nature of sin, and the dreadful consequences of it ; all the obligations of our duty in a more clear and particular manner, and the infinite advantage of complying with them ; the true expiation of sin, and the certainty of our repentance being acceptable in the sight of God, and effectual to obtain pardon ; and affording us sufficient helps and assistances, to enable us to perform what it requires of us, in order to our future and eternal happiness. This is, in the nature of the thing itself, a *great salvation* ; and the neglecting of which, (even separate from the consideration of the particular dishonour done to God by rejecting an immediate revelation of his will) is intrinsically in itself a most inexcusable neglect, and justly deserving the severest of punishments.

But then, 2dly, This further consideration, that the gospel is an express and positive revelation of the will of God, is a very high aggravation of the sin of neglecting so great a salvation. He that desires not to be delivered from the dominion of sin, and has no thirst after a life of righteousness, for that very reason deserves not to be saved from the punishment of sin, and is in his nature unqualified for the rewards of holiness. But when to this choice of wickedness there is added moreover a direct contempt of God ; when God has declared to men his will by an immediate revelation, and  
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confirmed the obligations of nature by his positive command ; when he has offered us pardon upon our sincere repentance, and vouchsafed us the assistance of his spirit to enable us to perform it, and promised us eternal life upon our performance of it, and has obliged us to accept this salvation under pain of the severest penalties ; the wrath of God being now most expressly revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ; after all this, to continue still to despise so great salvation, is adding rebellion to our sin, and with a high hand exalting ourselves against God ; 'tis an avowed despising and contemning his authority, and expressly declaring that we *will not have him to reign over us*. If therefore sinning barely against the law of nature, was sufficient to consign men to unavoidable destruction, how shall we escape if we continue to sin both against nature and revelation ? If the servant that knew not his Lord's will, was yet to be beaten with stripes, because he did things in themselves worthy of stripes ; how much more severely must they expect to be punished, who do the same things in direct opposition to the express will and known command of their master ? This was the reason why God punished the sins of his own people the Jews, with greater severity than those of the Heathen : And so now in like manner, whereas *the times of ignorance God winked at*, as the apostle expresses it, Acts xvii. 30. that is, he was less strict and severe with men before the revelation  
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of the gospel; now, on the contrary, under pain of his severest displeasure, he peremptorily commands all men every where to repent, there being no excuse left, nothing that can alleviate their condemnation, if men, after that the clearest light is come into the world, will still obstinately continue in their works of darkness.

3dly, The dignity and excellency of the person, by and through whom this great salvation is proposed to us, is a further aggravation of the sin of rejecting it. *It was at first begun to be spoken by the Lord*; that is, as the same apostle expresses it in the foregoing chapter, *God who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.* The dignity of the person, by whose interposition any favour is procured, and by whom it is transmitted, shows both the greatness and importance of the thing itself, and the love and condescension of the original author of it; and the neglecting it in this case, implies not only folly, insolence, and rebellion, but moreover, the greatest obstinacy also, which no authority can prevail over; and the basest ingratitude, which no kindness or condescension can overcome: which therefore whosoever is guilty of, must be confessed most justly to deserve the severest of punishments. This (the ingratitude of rejecting a mercy, offered with so much love and condescension, by the hands of a person of so great dignity) is what  
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our Saviour compelled the Jews to acknowledge, and made them condemn themselves for it with their own mouths, in the parable of the householder, St. Matth. xxi. 33. *who having planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen, first sent his servants to receive the fruits of it; and when the husbandmen had resisted and slain the servants, he afterwards sent his own son to them, saying, Surely they will reverence my son; but him also they resisted and slew: Whereupon when our Saviour appealed to the Pharisees themselves, to judge what it was fit for the lord of the vineyard to do unto those husbandmen; they immediately replied, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons: unwarily passing a just sentence against themselves; that for rejecting the gospel preached by Christ himself, they deserved a severer condemnation, than their fathers who had before rejected the preaching and admonitions of the prophets. The same argument is used by the apostle, in the words immediately preceding the text; If the word, saith he, spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord? And ch. x. ver. 28. He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God? And*  
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ch. xii. 25. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.*

4thly and lastly, The strength and clearness of the evidence, and the number and greatness of the proofs, made use of to assure us of the truth and certainty of the gospel, is the highest aggravation of the guilt of those, who neglect or disobey it; and that which of all other things renders them the most absolutely inexcusable. The gospel *was at first begun to be spoken by the Lord, and was afterwards confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost; whereof that which we this day commemorate, was both the foundation of all the rest, and in itself also of the greatest efficacy and of the largest extent.*

The stronger the evidence of any truth be, the more inexcusable is the making opposition to it. And the highest aggravation of this crime, is, to continue to oppose a truth, after the best and greatest evidence has been given of it, that the nature of the thing was capable of. Opposition in this case, against the greatest evidence that is reasonably to be expected, can proceed from nothing but either incurable obstinacy and perverseness; or a love of some things, and a resolution not to part with them, the keeping of which is inconsistent with the  
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acknowledgment of the truth. And this is plainly the case of those who reject the gospel, after the undeniable evidences that have been given of the truth of it by the *testimony of the Spirit*. Their rejecting it cannot proceed from want of sufficient conviction, but only from a love of vice, and a resolution not to be reformed; which is a degree of incorrigibleness, in which there is no hope of excuse, and for which there remains no remedy; and which there is no hopes of amending. When clear light is come into the world, and men still continue their works of darkness, then it becomes evident that their wickedness proceeds not from ignorance and want of instruction, but from will and choice; they love darkness rather than light, and stand in open defiance to God and his supreme authority. This is what our Saviour says of the Jews; St. John xv. 22. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin: If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.* This is the reason of his declaring to the cities of Judæa, *that it should be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for them; because if the mighty works that were done in them, had been done in Sodom, it would have repented in sackcloth and ashes.* This is the reason of his declaring to those Pharisees, who blasphemed the Holy Spirit, *that they should never have forgiveness neither*

*in this world, nor in that which is to come*; because they resisted the last and greatest means, that God would ever make use of to bring them to repentance; and not resisted it only, but reviled it also: they saw with their own eyes the clearest and strongest proofs of the truth of the gospel, that could possibly be given, and yet they not only withstood the evidence of those mighty works, but also blasphemed the Holy Spirit by which they were worked. Their crime was singular and unexampled; and their condemnation was likewise singular. But all others also, who reject the gospel, are, in proportion to the greatness of the evidence they resist, and according to the degree of their obstinacy and wickedness in so doing, inexcusable in like manner, and despisers of the *testimony of the spirit*.

The testimony which the spirit of God has given to the truth of the gospel, contains a great variety of undeniable proofs, which St. Paul calls *the power and demonstration of the spirit*. The many large and particular prophecies, which from the beginning of the world were dictated by the Spirit, concerning the person of our Saviour, and the nature, success, and effects of his doctrine: the conception of our Lord by the miraculous operation of the Spirit, and the manifold wonders which attended his birth: the visible descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism, accompanied with a voice from heaven, declaring him to be the beloved Son of God: the miracles which he worked  
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during the course of his ministry, by the *spirit of God*, as the Scripture frequently expresses it : his resurrection from the dead, which likewise the Scripture ascribes to the power of the same spirit, Rom. viii. 11. and 1 Pet. iii. 18. But above all, that most plentiful effusion of the Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost, whereby they were indued with power from on high, to preach the gospel with authority and efficacy, being enabled particularly to speak with tongues, and to do even greater works than our Saviour himself had worked upon earth, according to his promise which he made to them before his departure ; these testimonies (I say) of the spirit of God, contain such demonstrative proof of the truth of the gospel, as leaves them who reject it capable of no excuse, since they despise the last and greatest means, that shall be, or indeed could be made use of, for their conviction and reformation. This last miracle in particular, the gift of tongues to the apostles, was of all others the strangest, and in its nature and circumstances the greatest and most affecting that could be conceived. The apostles, on whom this gift was bestowed, were men whose parentage and education were well known to all that dwelt in Jerusalem : they were known to be illiterate and mean persons ; persons whose employment had been laborious, and their manner of life from the beginning, such as afforded them neither time nor opportunities, of being skilled in the learning and customs of their own country, much less of having studied the languages of other nations. Had they been



men of a polite and learned education, brought up in the study of their own law, and in the schools of the Scribes and Pharisees, it might have been imagined that this their skill in foreign languages might be the effect of study, and industry, of art and design, in order to gain applause from the people, and set themselves up as heads of new sects, and teachers of popular doctrines. But so far from this was their case, that on the contrary they were despised and contemned by their own countrymen for that very reason, because being well acquainted with their education and manner of life, they did not think it possible that any wisdom could be found in them, or any knowledge proceed from their lips. Exactly as they had formerly said of their master, when he went up into the temple and taught, St. John vii. 14. *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* And St. Mark vi. 2. *From whence has this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him? Is not this the carpenter the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Juda and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?* Herein therefore consisted the greatness of the miracle, that men of no education spake different languages perfectly; and that they did it immediately and at once, without any time, instruction, or study. Neither was there any room for any fallacy or deceit in this matter: for this thing was not done in a corner, but publickly in the midst of Jerusalem, and in the presence of innumerable witnesses; and that not once only, but with

a continued and permanent effect. The witnesses also that were present, were the best and most competent judges that could be, being persons of different nations, gathered together at Jerusalem upon account of the feast, to whom all the languages which the apostles spoke, were severally natural; so that they could not be deceived, or imposed upon in this whole proceeding. The natives of Jerusalem, who understood not the tongues which were spoken, nor knew whether they were really any languages at all, might indeed mock, and say that *these men were full of new wine*, Acts ii. 13; but the foreigners who heard each his own proper language, could not but be justly filled with wonder and amazement. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were witnesses that the apostles were illiterate men, and understood no language but their mother-tongue, nor were capable of using any art or fraud in this matter; and the strangers were witnesses, that what they uttered were true and real languages, and therefore could not be the effect of wine or madness. The testimony therefore of both together, made the miracle certain, unquestionable, and manifest; and accordingly the effect of it was proportionably great. For so we read, Acts ii. ver. 41. that *the same day, there were converted about three thousand souls*. This was the immediate effect of the gift of tongues at that very time; and the usefulness of it afterwards, was peculiar and more remarkable than of all other miracles whatsoever. For this enabled the apostles to preach the gospel to all nations, with such

speed and incredible success, that though men of other religions endeavoured to make converts as well as they, and some sects of the Jews particularly were infinitely industrious, and would compass sea and land to gain a proselyte; yet the preaching of the apostles, *like the day spring from on high, like the morning-light, which in a moment dispels the darkness from under one end of heaven to the other*, propagated the gospel in a very few years to a vastly larger extent, than ever any other religion was propagated in the compass of many ages. This gift of tongues ceased indeed after some time, as other miracles did, because all these sort of gifts were bestowed not for their own sake or intrinsic worth, but only in order to the propagation of the gospel, and to convince men of the truth of that religion, whose principal end and design consisted in those gifts and graces of the spirit, which were to continue for ever. Which end being once obtained, and the gospel established in the world, these miraculous gifts ceased; having been given, as St. Paul expresses it, *not for them that believe, but for them that believe not*. But those gifts of the spirit, in which consists the renewal of the mind of man, and which are the springs of all virtues which make us like unto God: these are to continue through all ages; and are so much more excellent and more desirable than the former, as the end is better and more excellent than the means. In our Saviour's and in the apostles time, it was very natural to the weakness of men, to be most ambitious of such gifts, as  
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made the greatest appearance, and could not but gain the greatest esteem and applause in the eyes of the world : but our Saviour himself cautioned his disciples, *not to rejoice so much at their being indued with a power of working miracles, as at their names being written in heaven:* And St. Paul afterwards took great pains to convince his hearers, *that though it was indeed lawful to covet miraculous gifts, yet he could still shew unto them a more excellent way;* that it was a greater and far more desirable thing, to instruct men in their plain and necessary duty, than to work the most stupendous miracle; *and that love and goodness, righteousness and holiness, meekness and charity, were things more excellent and valuable in themselves, than to be able to speak with all the tongues, either of men or angels.* The reason is plain, because the one is beneficial only to others, but the other to ourselves likewise; he that works a miracle or speaks with tongues to convince another, may yet possibly himself have no title to the rewards of the gospel; but he that is indued with those gifts which are the end and design of the gospel, and for the sake only of which all the rest were given, does thereby secure his own salvation, as well as promote the salvation of others. Let us then by charity and goodness, and the practice of all virtues, secure to ourselves that which is most excellent; and then, though the gifts of miracles be not continued to us, yet we shall obtain the end for which alone those gifts have ever been given to others. For, he that speaks with tongues for the conversion of others,

may (without the virtues of meekness and humility, love and charity) himself possibly become a cast-away: but he whose mind is indued with those inward virtues, which are the more excellent gifts and fruits of the spirit, has attained that end, for the promoting of which, the other outwardly brighter and more resplendent gifts, were all intended but as means.

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## S E R M O N XVIII.

A plain Inquiry into the Reasonableness of ridiculing Revelation, and the Merit of Christian Faith.

By the Rev. Dr. DELANY.

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2 PETER iii. 3.

*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.*

**T**HE expression of *the last days*, in the text, is varied by St. Jude, into that of *the last time*: *Beloved, remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you, there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.* Now by *the last time*, is evidently meant the times of the Messiah, according to that celebrated division of the duration of the world, among the Jews. Two thousand years before the law, two thousand years under the law, and two thousand years under



under the Messiah. Whether this division be strictly just, is no way material to our present purpose : our concern is only to know that the times we now live in must, from the early unprejudiced acknowledgment of the Jews themselves, be the times of the Messiah ; forasmuch as the times of the Messiah were always regarded as the last period in this great distribution, as exhibiting the last state of things ; the last of divine dispensations to mankind, in this world : after which, the world itself should be done away. And therefore this period is very properly signified by the expression of the *last days*, and *the last time*. And of this period, it is prophesied in my text, that in it should arise *scoffers walking after their own lusts*. And from the context it appeareth, that these *scoffers* were men, who turned all revelation into ridicule, and made a jest of all the promises and threats of the gospel. And whereas the coming of our blessed Saviour, first, to execute vengeance upon the unbelieving Jews, and secondly, to judge the world, were in the number of these promises ; these infidels could not forbear insulting the credulity of Christians upon these points, even in the apostolic age : even in that very age, wherein Christ had given such infinite proofs of his power, and his veracity. So hardened is infidelity to the greatest possible demonstrations of truth. And although the first of these promises was to be fulfilled in that very generation, and within a very few years, and actually was so ; yet could they not restrain their insolence even for so small a season,

season, but cried out, *Where is the promise of his coming?* even at the moment that his vengeance was impending over the heads of his enemies; nay, at the moment that the Roman army was executing some part of it upon them.

From the text, thus explained, I shall take occasion first to inquire into the reasonableness of this practice of ridiculing the principles and persuasions of those who believe the Scriptures to be the word of God: and secondly, I shall inquire into the nature and completion of the prediction now before us.

First then, &c.

Now if these principles are in themselves absurd, and senseless, it is indeed no wonder they should be objects of ridicule, to men of freer thought, and more enlarged abilities. But if, in truth, they contain in them nothing absurd and irrational, nothing unbecoming the dignity of our own nature, or unworthy the nature of God; it can never be either the duty, or the proof of superior wisdom, to make them the objects of reproach or ridicule, but quite the contrary.

Now the first principle of those who believe the Scriptures to be the word of God is this; that it hath pleased the Divine Being, at sundry times from the creation, to make several revelations of himself, and his will, to his creatures, in order to their happiness; to direct them in the several duties of life, and bind them more effectually to the discharge of them.

And in order to determine the reasonableness of this belief, it will be necessary to examine,

amine, whether man, with all his native advantages of reason and reflection, needed any assistance or direction, or restraint of a superior being: and it is certain, that if with all those boasted advantages, he continued weak and ignorant, and corrupt, liable to much error and iniquity, to many doubts that asked for instruction, to many dangers that called for aid, and many distresses that wanted relief; in this condition he must need the direction and assistance of superior wisdom and goodness, and the support and restraint of superior power; and that this is the best condition of man in a state of nature, requireth no great sagacity to conceive, nor ingenuity to acknowledge. And the man that was weak or wicked enough to deny this, to deny that he himself was weak, and wicked, and ignorant, would give such demonstration of his insincerity to the rest of the world, as would abundantly confute his own position. And if, after this, he needed any more than the reflections of his own mind, and the testimony of his own heart for his conviction, we might appeal to the present deplorable state of ignorance, barbarity, and brutality, under which the whole heathen world labours at this day; as well as to the complaints, the corruptions, and the confessions of the whole antient, and more enlightened heathen world, upon this head. And indeed God seemeth on purpose to have left mankind in several places, and periods of time, to the error of their own ways, and the vanity of their own wisdom, on purpose to convince them of the necessity



necessity of superior sanctions, and a direction more than human. Is it then absurd to believe, that a being, of infinite wisdom and goodness, should vouchsafe to instruct and admonish a creature that needed admonishment and instruction ; a creature liable to error and iniquity, and capable of information and amendment ? Or rather is not such information and assistance the necessary consequence of infinite wisdom and goodness ? For how is it possible to conceive highly, or even moderately, of the benignity of any being, who beheld his creatures, the work of his own hands, wandering in the ways of error and iniquity, and treading in the paths that lead to misery and destruction, without once reaching out his hand to conduct them ; without once vouchsafing **them** the least aid, or direction, or reproof : especially when he might administer any, or all of these, with infinite advantage to them, and without any degree of trouble or disquiet to himself. A father that dealt thus by his children, would be a monster among men ! and could not fail to be treated as a creature lost to all sense of virtue, as well as paternal affection. A man that was capable of less cruelty, even to *the beasts that perish* ; a man, that failed to aid and relieve an innocent and distressed brute, altho' with some degree of trouble to himself, could not but be regarded as greatly wanting in the principles of common humanity, and greatly estranged from that benignity and compassion, which is the truest test of goodness, and the sure characteristic of every amiable excellence  
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in our composition. And shall we then deny that excellence to Almighty God, without which even man would be defective, and unlovely! without which, he would be monstrous and malignant! And can it be weak and unwise to ascribe that perfection to the Almighty, which it would be so utterly senseless and iniquitous, and unphilosophical to deny him? Can it be weak and unwise to believe that God actually hath done, what would be so absolutely cruel, and ungodlike in him, not to do? With great submission then, the Deist hath no great reason to triumph upon this head, or to insult the believer's weakness and want of capacity. Nor is it possible for him to impute these defects and imperfections to others, upon this score, without shamefully and signally fixing those imputations upon himself.

The next principle of believers is this: that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the revealed will of God, and contain the chief of those several manifestations, which he hath been pleased to make of himself, and of his will to mankind, from the foundation of the world. The laws and precepts which he hath given his creatures to walk by, containing in the clearest terms, the rules of their duty in the several relations of life; together with their several sanctions of mighty rewards and dreadful punishments: and both these often and signally exemplified in various instances of mercy, and justice, and judgment, for the encouragement and reward of righteousness, and the

terror of perverseness. And since I have already shewn, that it is reasonable to believe, that God hath at several times made revelations of himself, and his will to his creatures; the question now before us, is, whether it be reasonable to believe, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain any of those revelations. And in order to determine us in this inquiry, it will be necessary to examine whether those Scriptures have all the marks and characters of truth, internal and external, that can reasonably be demanded, or were ever required, to ascertain the truth and genuineness of any writings whatsoever, in the same circumstances: such as antiquity, sincerity, honesty, and disinterestedness in the writers and relators; sufficient care in the keeping and conveying those writings to posterity, pure and uncorrupt; various copies in the hands of men of opposite persuasions and interests, to prevent all possibility of combination in fraud; stile and phraseology of the age in which they profess to be published; the consistency of manners, and times, and things, and characters, exhibited in them; purity, and perfection of the precepts delivered: and lastly, the dignity, coherence, and uniformity of the whole design; every way worthy the wisdom, and power, and perfection of the Supreme Being; whose will they profess to deliver, and whose work they profess to be.

And that they have all these marks and characters of truth, hath been demonstrated a thousand times; nor have all the enemies of  
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revelation ever yet proved them defective in any one of them, although frequently and loudly called upon, and provoked, and challenged so to do: and indeed often attempting to do so, to their infinite reproach! Have these writings as much evidence of their truth, as they could, in the nature of things, be reasonably supposed, or required to have, if all mankind agreed that they actually were true? They have, nor is it denied but they have: nay they have not only these evidences, but likewise evidences of a superior nature, such as no other writings ever pretended to, from the foundation of the world! National institutions, in memorial of facts there registered, coeval with the facts themselves, and uninterruptedly continued from that day to this; facts, which they could not be deceived in, and institutions of some danger, and great difficulty, and expence, which they could never combine to impose upon themselves and their posterity; and which if they had not begun in the time, and manner, and for the reasons there delivered, could never, in the nature of things, begin at all. Prophecies early delivered, and gradually compleated in almost every age, from that day to this, and many of them actually and incontestibly true at this instant. Prophecies of events, in themselves, exceedingly improbable; and such as no human wisdom could foresee, or policy contrive, or power bring to pass: and yet many of them not only attested, but fulfilled also, by the professed and known enemies to those very truths they were intended to establish. And if these writings are still  
false,

false, with all this evidence of truth, I desire to know of the deist how he will vindicate the justice, the wisdom, and the goodness of God, not only for permitting, but for furnishing clear, accumulated, invincible evidence to falsehoods?

And can it, after all this, be rational to disbelieve these writings to be true, which have all the marks and characters of truth, which any writings were ever known, or required to have, from the foundation of the world, and vastly more; such marks and characters, as no writings that had half of them, were ever yet found to be false: is it irrational to believe what it is impossible, upon any ground of reason, to doubt or to deny? Is it any way consistent with the Divine Goodness, is it possible in the nature of things, to give an infinite variety of invincible evidence to a lie? Most certainly it is not. And must we, after all, disclaim these writings, because a set of men are vain, wicked, and ignorant, and shameless enough to sneer, and to shake their heads, and break their jests, and revile where they should reverence; God forbid! This would be to renounce all the possible tests and marks of truth and certainty; this would be to reverse all the rules of a rational conduct and conviction; this would be to make error the test of truth, and madness the rule of reason.

The last principle of believers that I shall at present mention, is this. That the Scriptures being once proved to be the word of God, they are indispensably obliged to assent to the truth

of every proposition contained in them; and this is a necessary and unavoidable consequence from the principle of their proceeding from, and being inspired by God: for if they do come from God, every thing contained in them must be true, or God must be the author of untruth; which is impious and abominable, and impossible to be imagined by any reasonable creature. And it is upon this foundation that faith becometh the most rational principle, and the most indispensable duty that can be conceived; and at the same time the justest and truest ground of favour, and acceptance with Almighty God. For if the Scriptures have all the characters and evidences of truth that can be required to demonstrate any writing whatsoever to be genuine, and authentic, (as they undoubtedly have) we must of necessity receive, and admit them as such. And if we do admit them to be genuine, and authentic, we must of necessity admit the truth of every thing contained in them; and if we assent to the truth of every thing contained in them, we must of necessity have a firm confidence in all the promises and assurances there delivered; that is, we must have a firm dependance upon the power, and wisdom, and truth, and goodness, and mercy of Almighty God: in every point there contained, and in the manner, and under the circumstances there exhibited to us. And can there be a juster or more rational recommendation of any person to the Supreme Being than such a faith, and such a dependance? Suppose a prince had two sorts of subjects, one of them,  
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upon a careful survey and candid inquiry into his title, and conduct, and character, owned his authority and his laws; and upon all occasions made great acknowledgments of his justice, his wisdom, and his goodness, in a thousand instances; and not only professed, but really had an intire dependance upon him, on the score of those perfections, and the many proofs he had given of them. But another party of his subjects not only disputed, but rejected those laws, although they had all rational grounds of being satisfied that they were his, if they would but take the trouble to examine honestly and candidly into them; and in consequence of this disbelief, professed to have no dependance upon any of the declarations contained in them: owned indeed that he must be wise, and good, and just; that is, that the character of a King required him to be so: but for their part, they utterly disbelieved every instance that ever was pretended to be given of his wisdom, or justice, or goodness, or any other perfection that might relate to his subjects; of whom they believed him so utterly regardless, that they were satisfied he had never once troubled his head about giving them any laws at all, nor had ever yet rewarded the obedience or fidelity of any one of them in any one instance in this world, nor ever would! And as for punishing their disobedience, that they were sure was utterly inconsistent with that character of excessive goodness, which his admirers gave him, and which they were well enough inclined to believe of him. That for their own parts, they knew

their duty, and needed no direction; nor thought themselves bound to obey any one of those his pretended laws as such. They owned no particular or distinguished obligation to him, nor dependence upon him. And in consequence of these principles, never made him any open avowed acknowledgments, or addresses of thanks for his protection, and the infinite blessings and advantages of his administration, nor any petition for the continuance of them; but on the contrary, constantly avoided, and diligently declined all occasions, and places, and seasons, of discharging those duties to him. I say, suppose the wisest and best king in the world had subjects of these different characters, can it be a doubt with any rational creature, which of those subjects that prince was bound in honour, and in conscience, to have most regard for, or shew most favour to? And if it cannot, can it be a doubt with any rational creature, why faith is so strictly and strongly insisted upon in the Scriptures, as a qualification absolutely and fundamentally necessary to recommend us to the favour and acceptance of Almighty God?

But to this it is objected, that faith is not in our power: no man can command his belief; and therefore it is absurd to make that a necessary recommendation to the favour of God, which is in no man's power to attain. To this I answer, that faith is the effect of a rational conviction, and a rational conviction is the effect of an humble, a candid, and a rational inquiry: and is it possible any man can hope to be excused for neglecting to make such an inquiry  
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in the concern of his highest interest? To omit a thousand other books of unanswerable evidence in proof of revelation; will any man pretend to have read Lesly's method with the Deists, and the defence of it, candidly and carefully, and with an humble and honest resolution to embrace the truth, without as rational a conviction of the truth of revelation, as of any proposition in Euclid? And will any man then pretend to be excusable for want of faith? that is, for want of a rational conviction; when that want ariseth only from his neglecting to employ a few hours seriously, in the business of his own salvation? or what is full as bad, from indulging that pride and arrogance, which overbear and suppress the clearest evidence? And therefore, with great submission, the infidel is so far from having a right to laugh at, and insult the faith of Christians, that in truth all mankind have a right to insult, and despise him (as far as charity and humanity will allow) as the last and meanest of mortals; who, not content to be monstrously stupid, and senseless in relation to his own highest interest, hath yet effrontery enough to insult the wisest and most rational conduct of other men.

And thus having examined upon what wise grounds the deist laughs at the Christian faith, and the Scriptures in general, it will be proper, in the next place, to examine into the particular cavils by which they pretend to support this conduct. And here it might be sufficient to observe, in the general, that the deist maketh his own reason and even his own humour, and



vain imagination, the test of truth, and justice, and perfection of every kind: and therefore, if he can but lay his finger upon one passage in those sacred writings, which his ignorance, or prejudice, or favourite vice will not suffer him thoroughly to comprehend, and clearly to reconcile to the wisdom, and goodness, and other attributes of the Divine Being, he hath done with the whole business of revelation at once, and thinketh he hath an undoubted right to renounce it intirely. Now this conduct is many ways irrational and erroneous.

1st, Because many passages in those sacred writings refer to the state and things of another world; of which we have no adequate idea, and consequently, are to be considered as objects of faith, or trials of humility.

2dly, Because many passages in them refer to customs and manners now obsolete, and unknown; yet surely it would be strange reasoning to infer, that because none such are now known to exist, therefore no such ever did exist. And

3dly, Because our narrow conceptions are not the test of truth. Nothing but wisdom, infinite and unerring, can be such a test.

If ignorance could controul truth, or cavil overthrow excellence, what would become of the noblest principles and productions of astronomy, natural philosophy, and mechanics? What rare work would such critics make with the noblest productions of painting, architecture, and statuary, with the Cartoons, or the Rotunda, or the Colossus of Rhodes, upon the same principles? When instead of examining  
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the beauty, the grandeur, and the symmetry of the whole, they quarrelled with the filing, the polishing, or the colouring of some minute part, and disclaimed the whole upon that account. Such little minds have no ideas of those bold and judicious neglects which are oftentimes the surest marks of a great genius: ill would it fare with mastery and magnificence, with the noblest productions of nature and art, in the estimation of such mortals, as well as with the ways and works of God, recorded in the Scriptures! But with this difference, that upon a farther and stricter inquiry, the ways, and works, and word of God, are found not to ground so much as the pretence of any degree of real negligence or defect, or inaccuracy, to support the infidel's cavils against them. For example, one of these great geniuses is very witty upon the story of Balaam, and never met with any thing so ridiculous as the speaking of an ass! This poor creature forgetteth, that the organs of all animals are equally vocal in the hand of Omnipotence! and is angry that God should be said to do that by a brute, which he himself might do in some degree, by many of the inferior creatures, which are every day taught to speak. As for the decorum and consistency of the thing, it is in truth no more than God's making an ass do, in fact, what Æsop might make him do in fable, upon a proper occasion, with great beauty and propriety; and perhaps upon a candid inquiry, it will not be easy to conceive, how stupid obsti-

nacy, and brutal rage, could be more properly, or more effectually reprov'd, than from the mouth of such a creature.

Another quarrels with the sanctions of the divine laws, laid down in the Scriptures ; and positively pronounceth, and insisteth upon it, that a being infinitely good, cannot punish. When it is evident to a demonstration, that a governor of the world, that did not punish, and that too so dreadfully as to deter from evil, could neither be infinitely, nor so much as tolerably good, because such a conduct would leave the best beings in the world a prey to the worst ; which it cannot be consistent with any degree of goodness to permit. How fine and how just an address is that of the psalmist, to men of this character !

*Take heed, ye unwise, among the people, O ye fools, when will ye understand ? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear ? or he that made the eye, shall he not see ? or he that nurtureth the heathen, it is he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not be punish ?* Psal. xciv. 8, 9, 10.

The same great genius is very angry that God should be said to command the *Israelites to spoil the Egyptians* : what, God command injustice ? Impossible !

It is indeed impossible that God should be unjust, or command injustice ; but if it be considered that the children of Israel were a free people, invited to, and fairly possessed of one of the richest regions of Egypt, and afterwards most injuriously harrassed and oppressed by the  
Egyptians,



Egyptians, the direction of God at their departure, will justly be regarded not as a robbery, but a retribution. But supposing this were not the case, it is in truth no more impossible or iniquitous that God should command the *Israelites to spoil the Egyptians*, than it would be in a nobleman to give any one in this audience a bill upon his steward for any sum he thought fit to bestow upon him. Nor doth it require any more than common sense to see the equity of the conduct in one instance, as well as in the other. But the truth is, religion may say of reason, as Tully doth of Rome: it was the glory of Cicero, that his enemies were the enemies of the commonwealth: it is the glory of the Christian religion that her enemies are the enemies of common sense.

I have here mentioned three, as material, as wise, and as important objections against the truth of the Scriptures, as I ever yet met with in the writings of those great men, who so gloriously distinguish themselves by the high appellation of Free-thinkers. And did the time permit, it were easy to instance in others. And if God enable me, I will consider of them upon other occasions. In the mean time I beg your patience for a few moments, upon the second head of this discourse; to wit, the nature and completion of the prophecy in my text, *there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts*.

That the wisest and most important institutions should at any time be the objects of ridicule

cule to light libertines, and abandoned miscreants, hath nothing extraordinary or surprising in it. That the Christian religion, at its first appearance in the world, should meet with opposition of every kind, is not much to be wondered. A religion that opposed itself to the passions, prejudices, and corruptions of the whole world around it, could not fail to be much maligned, before it was rightly understood. And therefore one need not wonder to find it early and eagerly attacked, by a Lucian, a Porphyry, and a Celsus. But when it is sufficiently explained, and thoroughly understood, and not only proved, but allowed to have established the noblest system of morality and theology, that ever the world was blessed with; the most conducive to human happiness, the most perfective of human nature, and the most worthy the perfection and purity of Almighty God! that such a religion, at this time of day, and in a Christian country, when it hath not only the advantage of proof, but of prejudice too on its side, should yet be seriously reviled, and deliberately ridiculed by reasonable creatures, and professed lovers of truth, and of mankind! This, I own, is matter of as much astonishment to me, as the most surprising revolution, or phænomenon, or event, I ever yet saw, or read, or heard of. And therefore, the foreseeing, and foretelling this event, in these circumstances, was only within his reach, who *searcheth the secrets of all hearts, and seeth the thoughts afar off*. And the best way

way of accounting for this strange conduct, is, by considering it as the dreadfullest effect of that signal infatuation, which God, in judgment and in justice, suffereth any of his subjects to fall into, for their sins. In them is clearly fulfilled, as formerly in the Jews, that dreadful judgment of God, denounced by Esaias, and applied by our blessed Saviour in the 13th chapter of St. Matthew. *By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this peoples heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should be converted, and I should heal them.* But however these men may be insensible to their own infatuate stupidity in other respects, one instance of it is so glaring, that it is not possible they can reflect upon it, without shame and self-conviction; and that is, that whilst these scoffers are endeavouring to overthrow revelation, they are in truth establishing it. Whilst they imagine they are destroying the Christian religion, they are in reality but fulfilling a Christian prophecy\*! These rebels to their maker, are like the meanest rebels to their prince, their impotent opposition doth but confirm and establish the dominion it was intended to overthrow. This is the peculiar felicity of the Christian religion, as it is the peculiar privilege

\* The prophecy in the text.



348 *A plain Inquiry into the Merit, &c.*

of Jesus Christ, to *make his foes his footstool*; to raise him higher on his throne, and fix him firmer in it. To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R.

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# S E R M O N XIX.

Life and Immortality brought to Light  
by the Gospel.

By the Rev. Dr. CALAMY.

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2 TIM. i. 10.

—*And hath brought Life and Immortality to  
Light through the Gospel.*

**L**IFE and Immortality, by a figure often used in the holy Scriptures, is the same with immortal life, which our Saviour *hath brought to light*; that is, hath given us undoubted assurance of, by the revelation of the gospel.

For though all men by the light of nature have some apprehension of a future state, yet their reasonings about it, when left to themselves, are miserably vain and uncertain, and often very wild and extravagant. The best discoveries of the heathens about the other life were weak and obscure, and the wisest philosophers spake but doubtfully and conjecturally about it; nor even in the books of Moses, or  
writings

writings of the prophets, are there contained any plain express promises of eternal life. All the knowledge men had of it before, was but like the faint glimmerings of twilight, till the sun of righteousness appeared; till God was pleased to send one from that invisible world, even his own most dear Son, to dwell here and converse amongst men, to make a full discovery to us of this unknown country, and to conduct us in the only true way of this everlasting happiness; a happiness so great, that we have not words big enough to express it, nor faculties large enough to comprehend it; but yet so much of it is clearly revealed to us in the gospel, as is most abundantly sufficient to raise our thoughts, and incite our sincerest endeavours for the obtaining of it.

By which plain revelation of this state of immortality,

First, Is most illustriously manifested to us the transcendent goodness and indulgence of our most merciful Creator, in that he will be pleased to reward such imperfect services, such mean performances as the best of ours are, with glory so immense, *as that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive* the greatness of it. There is nothing in us, nor any thing done by us, that bears the least proportion to such an ample recompence. Our best actions stand in need of a pardon, so far are they from deserving to be crown'd. All possible duty and obedience we certainly owe to him, to whom we  
owe



owe our beings; and should God Almighty have exacted it from us only on account of his sovereign authority over us as we are his creatures, we had been indispensably obliged to all subjection to him; but that he should over and above promise to reward our faithfulness to him with eternal life, this is a most wonderful instance of his infinite grace and goodness.

Secondly, By this revelation of immortal life, is farther demonstrated the exceeding great love of our blessed Saviour, who, by his death and perfect obedience, not only purchased pardon for all our past rebellions and transgressions, not only redeemed us from hell and destruction, to which we had all rendered ourselves most justly liable, which alone had been an unspeakable favour; but also merited an everlasting kingdom of glory for us, if with true repentance we return to our duty. And this, if any thing, shews the infinite value and efficacy of our Saviour's appearing on our behalf, that by his most powerful mediation he obtained not only freedom from punishment, but also unexpressibly glorious rewards for us vile and wretched sinners, on easy and most reasonable conditions.

Thirdly, This especially recommends our Christianity to us, which contains such glad tidings, which propounds such mighty arguments to engage us to our duty, such as no other religion ever did or could. For since hope and fear are the great hinges of all government, and the most prevailing passions of  
human

human nature, what better thing can be propounded to our hope than to be as happy both in body and soul as we can be, and that for ever? What more dreadful thing to our fear, than everlasting misery? And this indeed is the utmost that can be said or offered to men in order to the reclaiming them from their sins, and recovering them to a conscientious observance of God's laws, that God hath appointed a day, wherein he will call all men to an account for the deeds they have done in this body, and reward the sincere faithful Christian with immortal glory, and punish the disobedient and impenitent with everlasting vengeance: and if men can harden themselves against these most powerful considerations, if they are not at all concerned or solicitous about their eternal happiness or misery, what other motives are likely to prevail with them, or able to make any impression upon them? For is there any thing of greater weight and moment, that can be propounded to the reasons and understandings of men, than what shall become of them in a state which they are very shortly to enter upon, and which shall never have an end?

I humbly therefore beg your patience, whilst, with all the plainness and seriousness I can, I apply myself to these three sorts of persons.

I. To those who would seem to doubt of this fundamental doctrine of a future life.

II. To those who profess to believe it, but not fully and heartily.

III. To those who do really and constantly believe it.

I. I begin with those who would seem to doubt of this fundamental doctrine of a future life. And though far better things are to be hoped concerning all here present, who shew so much respect to religion, as to bear a part in God's solemn worship; yet since nothing is more complained of than the prevailing atheism of this age, and since, if we judge of mens faith by their lives, we cannot but suspect many of those who pass among us for orthodox believers, to be really no other than mere infidels in these matters, I shall not wholly pass this sort of persons by: not that I design at large to shew you the unreasonableness of atheism, or to set before you the undeniable evidences we have of another world: but I shall put the whole cause upon this short issue.

Let us for once be so kind to the sceptical disputers against religion, as to suppose what they are never able to prove, that it is a very doubtful thing whether there will be another life after this; that it is possible that all these stories of a judgment to come, heaven and hell, are mere fables, the inventions of crafty politicians and designing priests; and that all good and virtuous men have been miserably deceived and sed with fond hopes and fancies, and have unnecessarily troubled themselves about the matters of religion, (and surely you will acknowledge this to be a very large concession) yet granting all this, nothing is more plain than that if we would act prudently, and consult our own safety, we ought to believe and live as if all these doctrines of religion were most certainly



true ; for every wise man will run as little hazard as he can, especially in such things as are of the highest concernment to him, and wherein a mistake would be fatal and undoing. Here therefore be pleased to consider,

1. What little hazard he runs, or what little loss he ordinarily undergoes, who believes and acts according to these principles, should they all at last prove false.

2. What extreme and desperate hazard he runs, who does not believe, nor live according to them, should they all at last prove true.

(1.) What little hazard he runs, or what little loss he ordinarily undergoes, who believes and acts according to these principles, should they all at last prove false. All that this man loses or ventures, is only some present gratifications and enjoyments which he denies himself; he crosses indeed the irregular inclinations of his nature, and forbears those excesses that are truly hurtful to him, and lives according to the dignity of his species, and is possessed with cares and fears about another world, (and these even the atheist himself cannot wholly free his mind from) and ties up himself to several rules and strict duties, which contribute not a little to his convenient living here ; and perhaps is exposed to some hardships, reproaches, and sufferings for righteousness sake : and this is the worst of his case. But on the other side, he is blessed at present with a contented life, with peace of conscience, and the joyful expectation of an eternal reward hereafter ; so that if he be in the right, he is then made for ever :  
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if not, if he be mistaken, his condition however will be no worse than other mortals, he will have lost indeed all the pains and trouble he was at about religion; but if his soul survive not his body, he will never be sensible of it, this disappointment will never vex nor grieve him in that land where all things are forgotten. So that a virtuous and righteous man may ordinarily pass his days here more easily and comfortably than any wicked person, and please himself all his life long with the hopes or dreams of future glories; which fancy alone, were it no other, will make him abundant recompence for all the self-denial it puts him upon. But if these things at last prove true, he is then blessed above all expression: if they prove false and vain hopes, and there be no other life after this, yet will it be as well with him as with the atheist, in the supposed state of eternal silence and insensibility. He runs no hazard, he loses nothing, except some forbidden pleasures, which in most cases it is best for him, even as to this life, to be without. He is safe, if these doctrines be not true; and unspeakably happy for ever, if they be true.

(2.) Consider the extreme and desperate hazard that man runs who doth not believe nor act according to these principles, should they at last prove true: for he stakes and pawns all that can be called good and desirable; he ventures being for ever undone and miserable, if he should chance to be mistaken in his opinion, and it should at last prove that there is another life after this. And therefore nothing would

sooner convince such men of their deadly folly, than if they would but sometimes ask themselves, when they are calm and sober, a few such questions as these : What though I have almost persuaded myself that religion is nothing but a melancholy dream, or a politic cheat, or a common error ; yet what if at last it should be true ? How dismal, and of what affrighting consequence, is a mistake in such a matter as this ? What amazing, surprizing thoughts, fears and despairs will it fill me with, if after all I shall find myself to be alive when my friends had closed my eyes, and should presently be hurried away into the company of those spirits, which I had before derided and drolled upon, and into the presence of that God, whose existence I had boldly denied ? What horror and confusion must it create, when my infidelity shall be confuted by such a woeful experiment, and I shall find myself suddenly entered into that endless state, which I would not here believe any thing of ?

Were the arguments on both sides equal, yet the hazards are infinitely unequal, since the one runs the chance of being for ever happy, the other runs the chance of being eternally miserable : which one consideration justifies the discretion of a religious man in renouncing and despising the glories and pleasures of this world, though it were very uncertain whether there were another life after this. How much greater madness then must they needs be guilty of, who reject this doctrine of another life, against all the probabilities, reasons, nay demon-

strations



strations of the truth of it? When they have as great evidence of the truth of it as its nature will admit; when God from heaven hath most plainly revealed it to them; when this revelation is confirmed by all the signs and testimonies they can reasonably expect and demand; nay, when he hath implanted in their souls such a lively apprehension of it, that they must offer the greatest force and violence to their minds, before they can bring themselves to disbelieve it? Nay, I believe, let the most resolved sinner labour and struggle ever so hard with himself to subdue and extirpate this natural persuasion of another life, yet after all his pains he will not be able wholly to root out all thoughts and fears of it. This shall suffice for the first sort of persons, those who doubt of, or deny this great fundamental of religion. I proceed now,

II. To those who profess to believe this immortal life, but yet do it not really and heartily. And this I fear is the case of the generality of Christians amongst us. For it may well be enquired, what is the reason that this promise of eternal life (than which there cannot be a greater) hath yet so little power upon men's minds, doth so little move their affections; what makes their endeavours after it so faint and languid? Are any of those good things which men here court and seek after, so desirable and considerable as the glories and joys of heaven? Or are there any evils in this world that can vie terrors with hell? This cannot be

pretended, since all the good or evil things of this world can only make us happy or miserable for a short time, for this life at most ; which is not to be named with living for ever either in unspeakable happiness or misery. Whence is it then that Christians are so strangely cold and indifferent about these most weighty things of another life, as if they were of no concernment to them ? After all our search, we must resolve it into one of these two causes :

Either that men, whatever they profess, do not heartily believe this doctrine, or else that they do not duly consider it.

(1.) Most men, whatever they profess or pretend, though they dare not renounce or deny it, yet are not heartily and thoroughly persuaded of the certainty of this future state. Their understandings were never rationally convinced of the truth of it, and so the belief of it is not firmly rooted and settled in their minds.

Would but God Almighty be graciously pleased to indulge to us a sight of those future glories and miseries which he hath revealed in the gospel, this we imagine would certainly prevail for the conviction and reformation of all men. Would he give us, though but a short and transient view of that blessed place where himself dwells, that we might but for a few moments behold the joys and triumphs of those happy souls that are admitted into his beatific presence ; or would he but open the gates of hell, and once suffer us to  
look

look into those dismal receptacles of impure spirits, that so we might be eye and ear-witnesses of their grievous torments and horrid despair: such a sight as this we doubt not would presently change us all, and make us whatever God requires us to be.

*But God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.* He governs men in a method suited to their reasonable natures, and hath given us such assurances of another life, as are abundantly sufficient to satisfy and convince the understandings of men, but yet may be resisted by those who have no mind, or are resolved not to believe it: for there could have been no trial of men, no discrimination made between the wise and considering, and the foolish and wicked, if the rewards of religion had been present, or exposed to our senses. God will not force a faith upon us, as the sight of these things would do, but will have it to be a matter of choice, and an instance of virtue in us. No praise is due to them who believe only what they see. Such cannot be said to believe God, but their own eyes; but rather, *Blessed are they, faith our Saviour, who have not seen, and yet have believed.* God hath denied us the sight of these things, to prove us, and try whether we dare trust his promises and threatenings. Our belief therefore of this invisible world, if we would have it effectual for the amendment of our hearts and lives, must be so strong and powerful, as to serve instead of ocular and sensible demonstration, (whence the apostle calls it, Heb. xi. 1. *The evidence of things*



*not seen*) that so the *things unseen*, which God hath revealed to us, may have the same effect upon us (not as to degree, but the same real effect) as if the other world were always visible to us.

Now our belief of any thing must necessarily be stronger or weaker, according as the evidence is upon which it is believed; and that not only as the evidence is in itself, but as it is perceived by us: for however evident a thing may be in itself, yet if it doth not appear so to us, our belief of it must be very uncertain and wavering, because it is groundless. Since then the truths or principles of religion, which relate to another life, are not things to be seen or felt, we can be assured of them only by undeniable arguments and testimonies, about which we must use our reason, and our discerning and judging faculties, before we can understand the force of them, or be really convinced by them. Not that there is any great difficulty in apprehending these arguments; but yet there is required such attention of mind and serious thought about them, and a frequent revolving the proofs and evidences of a future state, with such diligence and careful examination of them, as all men ordinarily use about other matters, wherein they are greatly concerned to find out the truth.

But now is any thing more plain, than that the generality of Christians, who profess these doctrines of religion, are so far from being rationally, by the force of arguments, convinced of the truth of them, that very few amongst them

them ever so much as set themselves to enquire into the reasons of their belief? They owe their faith solely to education, prepossession, instruction, and example of others, take it up without any consideration of the grounds and reasons of it: and is it then at all wonderful that this faith should have but very little force or power on mens minds, which is thus received without any rational conviction of their understandings, and which is thus weakly founded and supported? Any little blast will overthrow that house which is thus built upon the sand.

I deny not but that a belief thus taken upon trust, and confirmed by a long and customary profession of it, may be so strong, and a man may be so resolved in it, that he will never stir from it. But then, I say, this is not the faith our Saviour requires, or which God will accept in those who are capable of a better; and a Mahometan, born and bred at Constantinople, hath as good reason for his belief of the Alcoran, as such a one hath for the belief of Christianity. Such a faith is only an obstinacy in adhering to those things which we were first taught, whether true or false, and is common to men in all religions.

Our understanding is the imperial and governing faculty of our souls: it is that which doth engage our wills and affections, and so consequently by them move and excite us to action. When therefore our understanding doth assent to any truth upon clear and satisfactory evidence, being overpowered by the force of reason and argument, it must needs pro-  
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pound it with greater strength and authority to the lower faculties, and so must have more powerful influence upon all our affections and actions. Otherwise how can we expect but that any little reason should be too hard for, and baffle that faith, which is grounded on no reason at all? Or how can we think that those things which we believe, but without any sufficient convincing motive or evidence, should outweigh those things which we are most certain of, which we daily see, feel, and experience, such as are the present sensible pleasures, and the visible good and evil things of this life? This therefore is one great reason of the inefficacy of mens faith, that their belief of these great truths was never well rooted and fixed in their understandings.

(2.) If our understandings are so fully convinced of these truths, that we cannot any longer doubt of them, and yet this belief is not effectual for our reformation, the reason then must be only because we do not really consider them. The understanding hath not such an absolute power over the will, as necessarily to determine it always to that which it judges best and fittest; but after our understandings have yielded, our wills may stubbornly hold out against the siege and batteries of the clearest evidence, and strongest reasons, if the truths propounded be contrary to our fleshly lusts and worldly interests.

For the will of man is a kind of middle faculty between the understanding and the bodily inclinations; and as it is moved by our understanding



standing to follow and obey its dictates, so also it is most importunately solicited by our lower fleshly appetites or lusts, craving their several satisfactions and gratifications, and by outward objects that continually thrust themselves upon us, agreeably to those desires and propensities. Hence ariseth a great conflict between those truths of religion which are propounded by our understandings on the one side, and our inferior sensitive faculties on the other. Our lusts being checked and crossed by the hopes and fears of another life, make the shrewdest objections against the principles of religion, and do with all their force and power oppose the entertainment of them in our minds; and on the success of this contest doth especially depend the efficacy of our faith.

Thus it was with very many among the Jews, whilst our blessed Saviour was alive here upon earth. They could not resist those undoubted testimonies which he gave of his being the Son of God; but yet the love of this world, or fear of sufferings, had so much greater power over their wills, that they could never prevail with themselves to become his disciples. John xii. 42, 43. *Among the chief rulers many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

It is not enough therefore that these truths of religion have subdued our understanding by the evidence of reason, but they must also conquer our will, and draw out its affections after them,

them, before ever they can have any lasting effect upon our lives. For the affections of the will are the more immediate principles of all our actions; and therefore till our belief hath powerfully wrought upon these affections of love, desire, hope, fear, it can have little or no influence upon our outward actions.

Now the way and means to obtain this consent of our wills and affections to these truths thus propounded by our understandings, is often and most seriously to consider the immense greatness of the happiness offered to us; the extremity of the misery threatened; how vastly it concerns us what our portion shall be in that eternal state; how unspeakably sad and unpitied our condition will be, if we foolishly neglect providing for it; how infinitely the glory of heaven doth surpass all the joys and pleasures of this life. These things, and the like, in a lively manner represented unto, and fixed in our minds, will by degrees so captivate our wills and affections, as that we cannot but love and chuse this future happiness as our greatest good; fear and fly from this eternal misery, as the greatest evil that can possibly betide us.

Of such infinite moment are the concerns of eternity, that if we do but patiently attend to them, and exercise our thoughts freely about them; if we will not suffer our lusts to bribe and bias our judgments, or to stifle and choak these principles of religion, they will at last awaken our consciences, and prevail above all present temptations. And when our faith, by  
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the frequent and serious consideration of the mighty importance of these matters, and of their consequence to us, hath made such a compleat conquest over our minds and wills, then our actions will of themselves naturally follow. For men will live and act agreeably to what they love, desire, hope for, or fear most.

So effectually hath our Christianity provided for the happiness of all men, that nothing can make us miserable, but either not believing, or not considering the great arguments of religion.

The different behaviour of men, as to the promises of our Saviour concerning another life, I shall beg leave to illustrate by this plain similitude.

Suppose a person of great credit and authority should now appear amongst us, and should propound to us, that if we would follow him, entirely resigning up ourselves to be governed by him, he would safely conduct us all to a certain country or island, where we should possess all that our hearts could wish, should be all kings and princes, and flow in all manner of wealth, and enjoy an uninterrupted health; in a word, want nothing that men can fancy could contribute any way to their compleat satisfaction and contentment: and farther, that he would give all the security that any reasonable man could expect or demand, that this was no vain promise or illusion. Now some amongst us will give no heed at all to what this man offers, nor be convinced by any reasons or arguments



guments he can give them ; but being either prejudiced against his person, or disliking the conditions, straight reject him for a deceiver and impostor. These are the atheists and unbelievers.

Others are indeed convinced that all this is likely to be true, they cannot see any sufficient cause to doubt of it : but yet they enjoy such conveniencies, and are so taken with their present circumstances here, that they will not quit them for these hopes. These are the fond lovers of this world.

Others are willing to go to this place, but they think it time enough yet. They would tarry and live here where they are, as long as they can ; and when they can stay no longer here, then they would be glad to be waisted to this fortunate island. These are they that defer their repentance till a death-bed.

Others acknowledge that there is such a place, where a man may live as happily as this person describes, but they suspect that he doth not shew the right way to it. They would find out a nearer and shorter cut to this country. These are the heretics and schismatics.

Others are resolved to venture with him, and begin the journey ; but meeting with some difficulties and dangers in the passage, they are soon discouraged and frightened, and return home. *These are they who receive the word of God gladly, but when tribulation and persecution arise, by and by they are offended.*

Lastly, A few amongst us, wholly relying upon this person's promises, and preferring them  
before

before all present possessions and enjoyments, forsake all their concerns and relations here, and absolutely give up themselves to his guidance. And when in the passage they meet with any dangers or hardships, cross winds or storms; tho' this may make them stagger a little, and fill them with doubts and fears, yet they are resolved still to go on, and venture all upon it. These, and these only, are the true believers.

There are many degrees of faith, but the least degree of saving faith is, when the consideration of another world is become our most prevailing interest, and is the main principle that gives law and rule to all our conversation. Let none then think to be saved by such a faith as the very devils in hell have, and yet remain devils still. They believe these great truths of christianity as really and as much as thou dost, who only assentest to them in thy understanding, and confessest them with thy mouth, but deniest and contradictest them in thy life and practice.

To pretend to believe this great doctrine of another life, which shall never end, and not to govern our selves by this persuasion, is the most unaccountable and prodigious folly that a reasonable creature can be guilty of; according to that famous saying of a great man in this case, that "the strangest monster in nature was a speculative atheist," one who denies the being of God and a future state, "excepting one, and that was the practical  
"atheist,"

“atheist,” who professed to believe both, but lived as if he was certain there were neither.

Nor indeed is the difference between them great. The one, the atheist, winks hard, and so rushes blindfold upon eternal ruin. The other, the wicked believer, runs madly upon it with both his eyes wide open. How inexcusable must they be at the last day! what plea can they offer for themselves, who obstinately refused that happiness, which yet they acknowledged to be infinitely beyond all that this world could bless its most darling favourites with; who wilfully precipitated themselves into those evils and miseries which they had a plain foresight of?

I conclude this head with that answer which a defender of atheistical principles is said once to have given to a companion of his, who freely indulged himself in the same vicious course of life the atheist did; but yet took upon him to wonder how one that denied the being of a God, and of a future life, could quiet his mind in such a desperate estate. “Nay rather, (says the atheist) it is much more strange how you can quiet your mind, or sleep contentedly in such a vicious course of life as I see you lead, whilst you believe such things as you say you do.” And so indeed one would think that it was impossible for such a man to live in peace, without laying aside either his faith or his sins. Now the atheist chuses to lay aside his faith, that he may sin more quietly; the true christian lays aside his sins, that they may not defeat his hopes:



hopes: and which of these two acts more wisely, if we will not see in this our day, the final event and issue of things will certainly convince us to our everlasting regret and confusion. Thus much for those who do profess to believe another life, but do it not really and heartily.

III. All that remains is to apply myself in a few words to those who do heartily and constantly believe this great truth of another life after this; who not only assent to this doctrine with their understandings, but have made this future happiness their ultimate choice and desire. And to them I need not say much; for this faith alone will always teach them what to do, without the help of an instructor. It will e'en force them to do well, without a guide or monitor.

This will fortify our minds against all the temptations we may meet with from this world, or any of its bewitching enjoyments. So that that man who hath his eternal state always in his eye, is set above the power of the world's frowns or smiles. He can neither be tempted by the sufferings of this life, nor yet enticed by any of its alluring charms. Can he, whose thoughts are fixed upon thrones, and kingdoms, and immortal glory, be diverted by the gay baubles, or glittering toys which this world present him with? It offers him infinitely too little. When the soul once by faith is mounted beyond the stars into that place where God and his Saviour dwells, how mean and contemptible, how vile and sordid do all things

here below appear? When this whole earth seems but a point, how next to nothing is that small pittance of it which any one man can possess or enjoy? Faith looks beyond this present scene of things; beholds this world dissolv'd, and all the glory and pomp of it vanishing: and this curtain being drawn, there appears to his view a new world, wherein are joys, and pleasures, and honours substantial and eternal; the prospect and forethought of which rectifies his judgment about these inferior things, and begets very slight and undervaluing thoughts of all things on this side heaven.

This faith will inspire us with strength and activity, and carry us out even beyond our selves; will animate us with such courage and resolution, as that we shall despise all dangers and difficulties, and think eternal happiness a good bargain, whatever pains or trouble it may cost us to purchase it. Such great hopes set before us, will inspire us with an undaunted bravery and fortitude, and enable us to work wonders.

This conquers the love of life itself, which is most deeply implanted in our natures; for what will not a man give or part with for the saving of his life? Yet they who have been endued with this faith, have *not counted their lives dear to them, so that they might finish their course with joy.*

I have not time now to set before you the trophies and victories which this faith hath achieved; you may find many of them recorded

corded in the famous eleventh chapter to the Hebrews, where the apostle, for the encouragement of all true believers, propounds to us the brave examples of the holy Patriarchs and Prophets of old, *who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, out of weakness were made strong; were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword, wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, afflicted, destitute and tormented.* These, and many more like these, were the exploits of the saints under the old testament, who had not so clear a revelation of this eternal state, as we now have under the gospel. But far greater yet, and more stupendous are the triumphs of faith in the holy lives and patient deaths of the blessed apostles, and primitive martyrs and confessors; who with invincible constancy endured pains and torments to flesh and blood insupportable, only assisted and upheld by the grace of God, and a lively faith in this promise of his son Jesus. They clap'd their hands, and sang praises in the midst of scorching flames; they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and gave God thanks that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name: and without doubt God's grace and the same lively faith would produce in us the very same effects, and enable us to do and suffer the same things with the same joy and resolution.



But farther, this faith by degrees moulds and transforms the mind into a likeness to these heavenly objects; it advances and raises our spirits, so that they become truly great and noble, and makes us, as St. Peter tells us, *partakers of a divine nature*.

It filleth the soul with constant peace and satisfaction, so that in all conditions of life a good man can feast himself with unseen joys and delights, which the worldly man neither knows nor can relish. This makes him content with any small allowance of this world's goods, and glad if by any hard shifts he can rub thro' this world, till he comes to his kingdom.

He is but very little concerned about these seemingly grand affairs of this life, which so much take up and busy other mens thoughts and time. He converseth most with invisible objects, and with them finds that solid and lasting comfort, which all outward things can neither give nor take away.

He hath something to uphold and cheer his spirit under all worldly calamities and distractions; and when he is wearied with the impertinences of this life, or is not pleased with things here below, he can retire himself into the other world, and there entertain his mind with those ravishing joys that never cloy nor satiate.

Nay, this faith arms a man against the fear of death; it strips that king of terrors of all his grim looks: for he considers it only as God's messenger to knock off his fetters, to  
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free him from this fleshly prison, and to conduct him to that blessed place, where he shall be more happy than he can wish or desire to be, and that for ever.

All this, and much more than I can now speak, will this faith do, where it is sincere and hearty. It will serve us instead of sight; it will afford us a foretaste of this immortal happiness; it will give us present entrance into heaven in part, and at last a full and complete fruition of it.

O then let it be most plainly seen by our words, by our works, by all we do, wherever we are, what our faith and hope is. Let it appear to all men that *we walk by faith, not by sight* or sense. Sense is a mean, low, narrow principle, confined to this present time, and this lower earth; it can reach no higher than these outward visible things, nor can it look farther than things present. But *the just shall live by faith*; they steer their course and govern their lives, not by what they see, but by what they believe and hope for, looking beyond things temporal for those things that are eternal.

Let us not be ashamed of this our design and aim before all men, that whatever others think or say of us for it, we are resolved to be happy, not only for a few days or years, but for ever; that we will so use this world, as those that must shortly leave it; that we will so improve and husband our time, as remembering that it will soon be no more, but be swallow'd up in eternity. And did the stupid

world know and believe what you do, they would no longer wonder at your being so much moved in a case of such unspeakable and everlasting consequence.

Blessed be God who hath set such mighty hopes before us, who hath given us such glorious promises, who hath made such a plain and clear revelation of this eternal life by Jesus Christ, and hath by him taught us the true way of obtaining it; who himself became to us an example of that holy life he prescribed to us, and after he had suffer'd for our transgressions in our nature, enter'd into the highest Heavens to prepare mansions of glory for all the faithful followers of him. To whom therefore, with the Father and Holy Ghost, one eternal God, be ascribed by us and all men, all praise, thanksgiving and obedience, for evermore. Amen.



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## S E R M O N XX.

The Mistake, of relying upon Faith,  
considered, &c.

By Bishop H O A D L Y.

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E P H E S. ii. 8.

*For by Grace are you saved, through Faith;  
and that not of your selves : it is the gift of  
God.*

**T**H E R E are many mistaken notions, concerning the terms of our acceptance with God, by which men support themselves in their continuance in their beloved vices ; and endeavour to elude the force, and arm themselves against the power, of those plain texts of Scripture, which prove that the method laid down in the Christian religion, by which sinners may hope to be reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ, is the actual amendment of their lives and tempers in all such instances as they know to be contrary, in any respect, to the law of God ; and that this is indispensably required of them in order to their final justification at the great day of the Lord.

One of these mistakes, which I shall take notice of, and examine, in this discourse, is the mistake of those men who appear to be induced, by some texts of the New Testament, to rely upon Faith, or their believing in Jesus Christ, and confident application of his merits to themselves; and to expect salvation from this, considered as distinct, and separate, from obedience to the moral laws of the Gospel. And amongst the rest, the text which I have now read to you, hath been often heretofore, and is very likely to be often again, alledged to this purpose, by men who are thus disposed to lay hold on any thing rather than heartily to set about the uneasy task of reforming what is amiss in themselves. In the examination of this great and fatal mistake, I design,

I. To lay before you the plain meaning of St. Paul in the text.

II. To shew that no such pretence as this can fairly be built upon these, or any the like words in the New Testament.

III. To observe that St. Paul doth, in this very epistle, as well as in many other places, sufficiently declare against any such pretence: as our blessed Lord did likewise before him in the plainest words.

IV. To shew you in what sense, Faith, or believing the Gospel, is said to save us.

I. It will be very proper to lay before you the plain meaning of St. Paul in the text.

And, if you look into the chapter, you will find that he is there speaking of the former  
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condition in which the Ephesians were, before their conversion from a state of heathenism, to the belief of the Gospel; and magnifying God's mercy, and the exceeding riches of his grace, or favour, towards them, from the first verse to the eighth: in which he therefore goes on to make them sensible of their obligation to that God who had thus *quicken*ed them *who were dead in sins*. For by Grace are ye saved: that is, For it is very fit you should know and consider that it is by the mere grace and favour, or mercy of God (as the word signifies) that ye are saved through Faith; that ye are put into a method, and state of safety and salvation, by means of your receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is his own act, his mere mercy, that you have terms of acceptance offered you, upon your believing in Christ. The being saved in this method is by the grace or mercy of God, I say; *not of your selves*, that is, no contrivance, or appointment of your own; not owing to your selves: but it is the gift, the free contrivance, and offer of God to you, that you should be put into this happy state by the Gospel. This is the meaning of the expression, *and that not of your selves*; not, as it may sound in our translation, *and that Faith or believing, not of your selves*, but entirely the gift of God; (for the word That in the Greek is of the neuter gender, and so cannot so easily be supposed to relate to the word Faith going before:) But, that, or this whole matter, this your being *saved by Faith*; this being called into a state of salvation by the Gospel,



Gospel, is *not of your selves* but the gift, the favour, the offer of God, previous to all design, and thought of your own. Then follow these words, ver. 9. *Not of works, lest any man should boast*, i. e. And as the proposal of this gracious method of salvation was not owing to your selves, and your contrivance: so neither was such a favour merited at the hands of God by any past perfection, by any good behaviour of your own, preceding it. For, as I told you already, ver. 1. and 5. *you were dead in trespasses and sins*, when you were called to the knowledge of this merciful dispensation. And this I add, lest any of you should boast, as if you had deserved of the hands of Almighty God, by your past good behaviour, so merciful a dispensation, so gracious a proposal, as is made to you in the Gospel. Then he goes on to assure them farther that their happy condition is owing entirely to God, who had, without any contrivance or desert of theirs, ordered affairs so by his good providence, that they were now believers in Jesus Christ; and had the offers of salvation, upon the terms of the Gospel, brought home to them.

This, therefore, is the manifest design of the apostle in the text, to raise the gratitude of the Ephesians to Almighty God; and to inspire them with all possible regard to him; by putting them in mind that they were formerly in an helpless and miserable condition, dead in sins, void of the true life of reasonable creatures; that they had no thought themselves of  
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such salvation as had been offered them by the Christian religion; that they had no merit to engage God Almighty to make them such an offer, and preach such a state of reconciliation and salvation to them; that it was of his grace, or favour, that they were saved from their former evil condition of sin and ignorance, by believing and receiving the Gospel: for which they were obliged therefore to magnify the exceeding riches of God's mercy towards them in Christ; and not to attribute this happiness to themselves, who were before this void of every thing that could be pleasing to Almighty God, or influence him to shew them so great and remarkable a kindness. It is by grace that ye are delivered from your former miserable condition; it is an act of grace that *ye are saved through Faith*, or put into a state of salvation by believing the Gospel: and this being saved in this method, and by means of this believing, is *not of your selves*; but wholly owing to the good will of God, whose free offer, and gift it is. This being so manifestly the intent of the Apostle in this place; it appears from hence what I proposed in the second place, viz.

II. That no such pretence as that which makes Faith alone, separated from a good life and conversation, the condition on which we shall be accepted at last; that no such pretence as this, I say, can be built upon this passage of the New Testament: which will lead us likewise to the farther consideration of this mistake; and to give a true account of what  
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St. James and St. Paul, upon other occasions, have affirmed upon this subject.

As for the passage now before us; we have seen already that by our being saved by, or through Faith, is meant our being put into the true way of salvation by believing in Jesus Christ: and therefore that it cannot be laid upon any such expression as this, that it is this Faith or believing taken by it self, and considered without any influence upon our lives, that will at last be accepted by God; if we had opportunity of practising righteousness, and have refused to do it. Besides, every thing necessary to salvation must be represented as the method that leads to it: and because faith in Christ, believing in him, and receiving him for our master, is one and the first requisite; therefore we may be said to be saved by Faith, without any such meaning as that other things may not be as necessary, and as indispensable, as that.

But here it may be said, Doth not St. Paul expressly in another place attribute justification to Faith without the works of the law? Gal. iii. 6, 11. To which I answer, Doth not St. James in his epistle, ch. ii. 14. expressly combat that opinion which some men may falsely build upon this, viz. that Faith, without moral works consequent upon it, is sufficient to salvation? And is not St. James's epistle of authority with christians, as well as St. Paul's? And is not this a demonstration to all who acknowledge this, that St. Paul could not intend any such thing as some have fathered upon



upon him? But this is not all that is to be said. For it is manifest that St. Paul is there speaking of such works of the law, as circumcision; and arguing, that such are not necessary, from Abraham's being justified by the eminent Faith which he had before circumcision: and this against some persons who would still pretend that the observations of such things was necessary to the favour of God. Add to this, that St. Paul uses the word Faith for the gospel-dispensation preached by Jesus Christ; and is only arguing that that is sufficient without the observation of the Mosaical ceremonies. But he is never arguing with design to make men believe that a mere empty Faith, void of good works, the works of righteousness, can save any man at last: but saith much to the contrary in all his epistles. But with respect to what is said both by him and St. James, concerning the Faith and justification of Abraham and of Christians; it may be proper to observe as follows:

1. St. Paul saith that Abraham was justified without, and before, such works as circumcision. St. James saith that Abraham was not justified by an empty Faith without works of obedience; and would never have been accepted of God, unless he had shewn the reality of his faith by obedience to the call and command of God. Here is no contradiction between them. So likewise Christians will be justified by means of believing the gospel-dispensation, without any such works as circumcision, or any other works of the ceremonial

monial law ; as St. Paul argued : but they will never be justified, and finally acquitted by any belief in Christ, without bring forth, as they have opportunity, such good fruits, and walking in any such good works, as the Gospel of Christ directs, and commands them to practise ; as St. James saith. Again,

2. Abraham was, for one signal act of Faith and trust in God, called by him *righteous* ; taken for such, and reputed as a person free from the guilt of his past sins : as saith St. Paul. But it is manifest, saith St. James, that this Faith of Abraham was not such an empty Faith as some Christians pretend to rely upon : nay, that he would not have been justified finally by God, unless he had, when he was tried by God, shewn by the obedience of his life, that his Faith was real, and sincere. Neither in this is there any contradiction between them. So likewise it is true that a Christian, upon his first believing the Gospel, and receiving Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Saviour of the world, is acquitted from the guilt of his past sins ; and reputed at this time, and for the sake of this Faith, as a just and righteous person, clear from all past guilt : as St. Paul always taught the first Christians, who were converted at ripe years from a life of infidelity and sin. And so likewise it is true that no Christian who hath opportunity, after his conversion, to practise holiness, and yet continues unfruitful, or wicked ; that no such Christian, I say, shall be finally justified and acquitted, at the last day, for the sake of his believing

ing in Christ ; as St. James teacheth : but that the final justification of such Christians depends upon their shewing their Faith by their works, as St. James expresseth it ; and upon their bringing forth good fruit in their lives and conversations. .

Thus may it easily be seen that these two apostles perfectly agree concerning the necessity of a good life, and of every branch of the law of virtue. But St. Paul had to deal with a sort of Jewish Christians, who retained an affection for the works of the law, and circumcision particularly : and therefore found occasion to tell them that their father Abraham himself was justified without such works ; that is eminent Faith was one time counted to him for righteousness, or justification ; that for the sake of that Faith he was esteemed by God free from all the guilt he had contracted by sin before that time ; and that therefore it was nothing but what was agreeable to that great example which they pretended to love and honour, that God should accept such as believed in his son Jesus Christ, without their adhering to such works as circumcision ; and for the sake of that Faith in reward, and for encouragement, of it ; should acquit them from the guilt of all their sins committed before that time. But St. James found that some misunderstood and perverted such doctrine as this : and that some Christians began to pretend that no works at all, not those of piety, and charity, were necessary to their justification at the great day ; and that  
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their believing in Christ would acquit them from the guilt of all their sins that they should commit after this belief, and during the time of their christian profession. And therefore he found it necessary to tell them, that Abraham shewed his obedience to God's will in the highest instances, and trusted not in an empty Faith; but, tho' he had been once acquitted from past sins by an eminent degree of it, yet that he did not expect to continue in favour with God, unless by obeying all his commands, and shewing himself ready to fulfil his whole will; and so likewise that Christians cannot expect to continue in the favour of God, or that state of justification and acceptance which their first believing put them into, without imitating Abraham's obedience, and following his steps in good works, as well as in Faith; or rather, that there can be no such thing as true Faith without good works, any more than there can be a good tree without good fruit.

These were the different reasons for the different, tho' not contradictory, positions of these two apostles; and for their different manner of handling this point. And in this matter great account is to be had of the following distinction; that believing in Jesus Christ acquits from the guilt of sins committed before such belief; and this merely in order to a better life for the future; which was St. Paul's frequent affirmation: but that believing in Jesus Christ doth not acquit from the guilt of any sins continued in, after this belief,

belief, and during our christian profession, but indeed add to it extremely, as St. James in effect affirms; and as St. Paul often taught. Which will appear more plainly from what will be said under the third proposition, viz.

3. That St. Paul doth, in this very epistle, as well as in many other places, sufficiently declare against any such pretence as that which I have been now examining: and this in imitation of his great Master who did the same before him. Our Lord, you cannot but remember, set himself against this very deceit, by which he foresaw that many of his professed disciples would endeavour to elude the great design of his coming into the world. The words you have often had in your ears, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven: But he that doth the will of my Father which is in Heaven:* a declaration which, in other words, expresseth this very thing, that it is not believing in him, or acknowledging him for our master, or applying his comforts to our selves, that shall avail us at last; but the *doing the will of his Father*; or a constant universal obedience to the commands laid upon us in his Gospel. This I repeat to you, under this head, because it is so express a declaration against men's relying on faith only for salvation, or final justification, that a more express one could not have been made in words.

After having remarked this, I come to shew that St. Paul himself guards against the same fatal mistake in this very epistle, in which he

declares that *we are saved through Faith*. He doth indeed profess to the Ephesians, ch. i. ver. 9. that their being in so happy a state came not of *their works*: but that is meant of their works before their conversion; that they had no merit to invite or induce Almighty God to offer them such salvation. But in the very next words, ver. 10. he declares that we christians are *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works*; that we are, by conversion to christianity, as it were a-new created by the will of God, calling us to it; and created for this end, that we may perform good works. So that you see he immediately guards against any such notion, as they might weakly entertain, of his attributing our final salvation to Faith separated from good works, in the Gospel sense of good works. And indeed, though in some places St. Paul doth vilify the merits of the world and their behaviour, before the coming of the Gospel; and though in others he vilifies the works of the law of Moses, with which some would have burthened the evangelical profession: yet no one can shew any one text, or any one single passage, in which he vilifies, and sets at nought, the works of evangelical righteousness, or obedience to the moral laws of virtue.

To vilify and decry the behaviour and works both of Jew and gentile, before the Faith of Christ prevailed, was not to set at nought good works, but bad ones; and only to observe the corrupt and sad estate of mankind. To vilify the ceremonial law, after the coming in  
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of justification by Faith (or the Gospel) was not to vilify such works as we are speaking of: but indeed to take men's minds off from shadows and ceremonies; and to fix them upon good works that are more substantial. Nay, when he ever toucheth upon the moral duties; with how much vehemence doth he recommend them? When he speaks of the Ephesians, or other christians, having improved in virtue, since their conversion to christianity; what commendations doth he give them? And with how much joy doth he offer up his thanks to God for it? But we never find him depressing that sort of works; or setting up Faith against them; or taking off the bent of men's minds from them: but pressing them into the love and practice of them with all the earnestness possible. And then, if he mentions the sins of any professed christians; doth he do it, as if he thought their Faith would avail them? Or rather, doth he not do it with such a spirit and zeal against them, as if no words were bad enough for them? And yet they had an easy reply to make to him, had he taught them any such doctrine, as that a strong Faith would save them at last, though separate from good works.

But particularly, in this epistle, how many moral duties and good works doth he press upon the Ephesians? And how solemnly doth he assure them, ch. v. 5, 6. that the immoralities there mentioned will exclude all, who are guilty of them, from Heaven? And adds, *Let no man deceive you with vain words: for*

*because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.* He puts them in mind, ver. 8. that they were sometimes darkness; but now light in the Lord: *walk as children of the light.* For the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth, ver. 9. and so on. Doth all this, and an hundred times more of the same sort, that might be urged from his writings: doth all this look like the doctrine of a man who taught them that Faith, without goodness and virtue, would save them at last? Or rather, is not all this plainly inconsistent with that supposition? And doth it not all shew that it is impossible he should intend to teach any such doctrine; however his words may sound at first hearing?

I mention not here, what I have often mentioned upon the like occasion, that it is contradictory to the declared design of the christian religion to suppose any such thing as this. For if the mere believing in Christ shall save us at last; though during that belief we have wilfully persisted in disobedience to his commands: then it is not true that he came to call sinners to repentance; then it is not true that the grace of God hath appeared to men in the Gospel, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; then it is not true that our Lord expects us to bring forth fruit; or to be prepared for his coming by good works; or that he will judge us according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil. But on the contrary, these things are true;

true ; and most expressly, and positively asserted in the New Testament : and consequently it cannot be true that Faith, without good works, will save us at last : nor can any thing be true, that takes away the absolute necessity of an holy, and virtuous conversation.

But now, after I have thus guarded against that bad and pernicious sense in which any christians may understand some expressions of holy Scripture concerning our being saved by, or through, Faith ; it is time,

4. To consider a little in what sense it is that christians may be said to be saved by Faith, or by believing in Jesus Christ. And

1. This may be well said of them, because it is their Faith, or believing, which saves them from the guilt of all their sins committed before this Faith : a privilege which peculiarly belonged to the first christians converted, at years of discretion, from a life of sin and impurity. And therefore, this first justification is often spoken of by St. Paul in his epistles, and attributed to Faith. But this doth not concern those who have been educated, and instructed, in the knowledge of the christian religion. The guilty sinner in those days knew not whither to fly from the guilt of his sins, till his belief entitled him to this favour ; which God had annexed to it, and the Apostles always promised in his name.

2. We may be well said to be saved through Faith, because it is by believing in Jesus Christ, that we come to know and embrace those terms which are offered by God for our sal-



vation and happiness. He came to save us; and by closing in with his proposals we must be saved: and this we cannot do, without believing him to be sent of God, and receiving him as such. This, therefore, being absolutely necessary; we may well find salvation attributed to this, which is the first moving principle towards it; and without which we should not go one step forward in that way to salvation which he came to point out to us. *He is the way, the truth, and the life*; and without knowing him, and believing in him, how should we know the way, or the path, to that eternal life which he came to unfold to us; who otherwise might have wandered, every one after the peculiar imagination, or inclination, or humour, of our own hearts? As salvation, therefore, comes in the method proposed by Christ; so may it well be attributed to believing in him; because that alone can put us into the method proposed by him.

3. Christians are saved by Faith, because it is the foundation of their obedience, and of all their good actions. It is the tree which bears good fruit; without which good fruit there could be no salvation; and consequently, what is so necessary, and so useful, to the production of good works, is it self entitled to those rewards, and happy consequences, which follow good works. This is what St. James seems to think, that the only way of proving that we have Faith, is by our good actions, ch. ii. 15. Will any one, saith he, believe that you wish them well, or that you are willing to

to relieve them, if, when you see their distress you only tell them so; and at the same time deny them what you can afford them towards their relief? From hence he argues, As there is no true sign of this charitable disposition, but the fruit of beneficence which it produceth; and as one who is always hard-hearted hath no pretence to it: so is there no proof of a real Faith, but the works it produceth; of which works, therefore, a sincere Faith is never destitute. Thus will even he allow that Faith may save us, by influencing our actions; but no otherwise.

Let any one likewise turn to the xith ch. to the Hebrews; there indeed he will find an account of the excellencies and advantages of Faith; of its acceptableness to God, and its efficacy towards our own happiness: but he will find that the argument must be resolved into this at last, that *without Faith it is impossible to please God*, because without Faith it is impossible to live a life of virtue, or to do such actions as are there recorded: and that by Faith is meant a vital active principle, moving us to behave our selves agreeable to our Faith. And therefore, with respect to Christians, Faith must be an active principle, influencing and strongly moving them to such a behaviour, and conduct; such a life and conversation, as their believing in such a master naturally directs to. If we believe in God truly; we cannot but love and honour him above all things. If we believe in Christ sincerely; we cannot but endeavour to obey his commands; observe

his precepts ; and follow his example. And thus shall we be *saved through Faith* or believing in him ; because this Faith, if it be sincere, will be the foundation of such an universal obedience as he requires of us.

In these senses, therefore, and on these accounts, great things might well be said of Faith in the New Testament ; and salvation attributed to it. But the great point, in which we are concerned, is, not to be deceived in a matter of such importance ; and to that end, not to interpret any one expression of the New Testament so as to contradict the plainest and most repeated declarations of it. Let the conclusion of the present subject, therefore, be to this effect, Faith is an act of the mind most acceptable to God. Faith in his Son saves us, as it puts us into the secure way to salvation, if we be sincere ; and as it is the foundation of all our christian practice, and of all our best and most godlike behaviour. This Faith alone, that is, the method proposed in the Gospel, without the works of the ceremonial law of Moses, is sufficient to secure to us our future happiness : but Faith alone, that is, a belief in Christ, without obedience to his laws ; an empty, unfruitful Faith, accompanied with an ungodly life, will condemn us at last. We are saved through Faith ; or by believing in Christ ; no otherwise than by being influenced by it : for Faith is required in order to practice. Faith is indispensably necessary in order to salvation : and



so likewise is a good life indispensably necessary in order to salvation: Or, in other words, a Faith working by love, and manifesting it self by good works, is that alone which will be of any account to us, at last. *For as the body without the spirit is dead; so Faith without works is dead also.* Now to God, &c:

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## S E R M O N XXI.

The true, and false, Notions of Repentance, considered.

By Bishop H O A D L Y.

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ACTS iii. part of the 19th verse.

*Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out.*

THE great concern of all Christians is, so to pass through things temporal, that they finally lose not the things eternal: and the most important enquiry in order to this, is that which leads us to the certain knowledge of those terms upon which God will pardon, and accept us. But though this be a point of infinitely the greatest importance of any that can come within the thoughts of a Christian: yet there is no point, in which Christians act a more careless, and surprizing, part than in this; and none in which they more willingly contribute to their own deceit, and ruin. Nor in any thing is this more visible, than in those false notions which many give themselves leave to entertain concerning

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the nature of that Repentance, to which they find the promise of forgiveness to be annexed in the Gospel. As it is our duty, therefore, to put a stop, as much as we are able, to such mistaken apprehensions, as may endanger the eternal happiness of men, I shall endeavour, in this discourse,

I. To shew you the true nature of that Repentance, which is of force for the remission of sins. And,

II. From hence I shall make appear the great weakness of those mistaken Notions of it, by which many Christians have been deceived.

I. In order to shew the true nature of that Repentance which is spoken of in the New Testament, I shall premise two or three observations, *viz.*

1. That our blessed Lord, and his apostles, preaching to a world of men, grown up in heathen impieties; and arrived at full age, without such bright light and conviction, as the Gospel brought along with it, constantly speak of Repentance in their discourses to them, as the first step towards their acceptance with God. This we may see in the Gospels, and all through the Acts of the Apostles; that, when heathens, or wicked Jews, are spoken to, and instructed what to do, in order to salvation, the first word generally is; Repent: as here, in the text, St. Peter calls upon the Jews who had hitherto *rejected the Lord of life*, to repent; and that in order to their being converted; as it follows. For the first step that a vicious man can take towards a change of his life, is to be truly sensible



fible of the unreasonableness of that course of sin and iniquity, in which he hath formerly lived; and to have due sentiments of his past behaviour: because, without this due inward sense of it, he can never heartily consent to forsake, and amend it; or, in the expression used the text, to be converted, or turned from it. Thus in the second chapter of the Acts, the same St. Peter exhorts the unbelieving Jews, *Repent and be baptized*. Repentance is the first step: because, as I have already observed, without a sense of the unreasonableness and wickedness of their former state, they could not possibly, with sincerity, think it worth their while to believe in Jesus Christ; and to be baptized, and entered, into his religion, so different from their former condition.

And this being the first step that could be taken by an unbelieving, or wicked man; no wonder that this is pointed out as the first, in order to salvation, or remission of sins. Upon this first Repentance of unbelievers, they were baptized, and by baptism put into a state of salvation; and a capacity of being happy upon the conditions of Jesus Christ: and therefore this may well be spoken of, as the road to salvation, and happiness; because without it there could be no entering into the Christian dispensation. This, then, is that condition of acceptance, which is chiefly spoken of through the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles; which give us an account of what was said to unbelievers, and wicked Jews, or Gentiles. But,

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2. The next observation I have to make is, that, as soon as this first condition was complied with, and men were persuaded by the apostle's preaching into a due sense of their past evil courses, and into a thorough renunciation of them; that, as soon as they were, in consequence of this, entered into the Christian religion by baptism, and were professed members of Christ's body, the church: that then, I say, all the exhortations of the apostles, and all their persuasions, ran perpetually upon *newness of life*; upon *working out their own salvation with fear and trembling*; upon the danger of falling back into their former state; and upon the perfection of virtue required of them. This is plain from the epistles, written by the apostles to professed Christians: which are full of the most pathetic exhortations to all virtue; and of the most severe reprehensions of all vice; and of the plainest condemnations of Christians, who are wilful sinners, to the greatest degrees of God's displeasure.

So that from your observation of what you read in the Acts of the Apostles; and of what you find in their Epistles; you cannot but make these two conclusions: That Repentance is the subject of their sermons, when they are preaching to unbelieving, or wicked, Jews and Gentiles; in order to persuade them to leave off their former behaviour, and come over to the Christian religion: and that, after they are Christians, they are with the same earnestness pressing upon them the absolute, indispensable, necessity of all holiness and virtue; as they were

were before inculcating the necessity of their renouncing their former state of infidelity, and vice. The frequent mention of Repentance is made to those who were not already Christians: but to Christians, the practice of all virtue, and the positive improvement in all that is good and praise-worthy, is vehemently recommended. But,

3. Though this be so in fact; as will appear to any one who will compare the preaching of the apostles to unbelievers, with the moral rules and instructions given to believers; yet I must observe that there was place found for Repentance, in favour of such professed Christians as wilfully sinned, upon their giving evident tokens of the sincerity of it. But then, there was no other token of it supposed to be sincere but actual amendment, and reformation; without which it is evident, from the tenor of all the Apostles declarations, in their epistles, that there was no hope of acquittance at the last day of accounts. Thus the sinful Corinthian was restored to peace; not till he was in danger of being *swallowed up with over much sorrow*, 2 Cor. ii. 7; and after much more difficulty, and severity of discipline, than was used in admitting the Repentance of one who had not before professed himself a Christian. If any one who was *called a brother*, i. e. a Christian, was an habitual sinner; his company was to be avoided by other Christians, as one whom they were not to own for a Christian, in those days when it could be done, 1 Cor. v. 11. But this was upon supposition of the person's not amending



ing his life : for it is evident that, upon the tokens of a sincere amendment, he was admitted again to the hopes of happiness. *Let him that stole steal no more*, was the method which St. Paul prescribed in the case of the sin of theft : Ephes. iv. 28. which implies in it, that amendment is the sum of the Repentance of a Christian ; and that, upon that amendment, he is in a safe condition.

I could give more evidence of this from the first records of Christianity : but this one argument is sufficient, which I have heretofore enlarged upon ; *viz.* that the Gospel would in vain profess to bring salvation to mortal men, if every wilful deviation from the rules of virtue were so unpardonable, that no future amendment were sufficient to entitle the sinner to the forgiveness of what was past. For, as to forgive sinners without actual amendment and reformation, would be to encourage them to continue in sin : so, absolutely to deny forgiveness to every wilful sin, though sincerely repented of, and forsaken, would be to drive men by despair into the same state of sin ; and to defeat the designs of the Gospel. And therefore, we may be sure that, as nothing but amendment, and future holiness, can entitle a Christian to forgiveness of his past sins ; so these most certainly will do it.

Thus then the case stands. The unbelieving world of Jews and Gentiles, were supposed by the apostles to be great and wilful sinners : and therefore, Repentance was the first thing spoken of, to them. Believers, or Christians, entered

tered into, and solemnly engaged in, the holiest of all institutions, were not supposed by them to be wilful sinners; or to continue in those sins which they had renounced at baptism: as the apostle himself argues, Rom. vi. And therefore little mention is made to them expressly of Repentance; but much of living worthy of their profession, and of fulfilling all the laws of morality, and virtue, in the highest degree possible. But if any of them were overcome by sin, and tempted to transgress the rules of their institution; amendment was required and accepted, for the sake of that *advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

What therefore remains for us, who are professed Christians, to do in this matter? Certainly, we are not to look merely to that which was recommended to Jews and Gentiles, as the first step only towards happiness: but to those injunctions laid upon such as became professed Christians; and to the methods prescribed to them. And then, we can never mistake in this great and important affair: because we can never think ourselves at liberty to dispense with that holiness, and perfection of virtue, which is constantly pressed upon Christians. If therefore we take in the whole of this matter; and consider Repentance with relation to professed Christians, who have been sinners; as something which will entitle them to God's favour; it must certainly equally suppose and imply in it these following parts:

1. An hearty sorrow and deep concern, for all past transgressions of the laws of God.

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2. An unfeigned disposition of mind, opposite to that of sin and wickedness, and tending to fulfil his will. And,

3. An actual avoiding, or resisting those temptations, by which they have been formerly over-powered; and an actual practice of the contrary virtues.

1. With respect to the first of these; all are willing enough to admit that Repentance must suppose and imply it; because a little sorrow, and a short-lived passion, will cost them little pains, and trouble. The lowest notion of Repentance takes in that of being sorrowful; and having a tender disposition of mind, for the present, whilst that sorrow lasts. About this, therefore, there needs no debate; because this is the part of Repentance which the weak side of human nature is the most pleased with. But,

2. There must be a change of disposition within. The word used in the New Testament signifieth an alteration of the purpose, and frame, within.

St. Paul reckons not sorrow a part of Repentance; but Repentance an effect of sorrow; 2 Cor. vii. 10. *For godly sorrow* (and that is the sorrow, we are now speaking of) *worketh Repentance to salvation, not to be repented of.* It worketh such a disposition of mind, as manifestly shews what it is that produceth it. If any person be concerned, and sorrowful at any thing that hath passed him; it never fails to work in him a disposition leading to the contrary for the time to come. And, if you consult the movements of your own minds, you



must find that a true concern within, at any past part of your conduct, is never without a firm thought, and disposition, contrary to that which hath caused that regret, and concern, in you. If this be so, in all other cases; we may depend upon it, it is the same in this now before us. If we be truly sorrowful, and heartily concerned, that we have offended God, and sinned against his laws; this will certainly be accompanied with as sincere, and as hearty, a disposition to please him, and obey his whole will for the time to come. And it cannot be supposed to be a sincere sorrow without this. Nor is this all: for,

3. This sorrow, and this change of mind, if they be sincere, must unavoidably produce a course of behaviour contrary to that which caused this sorrow, and this disposition: and if this be not the effect of them, they are of no account; unless it be to increase the condemnation of those who pretend to them. Thus St. Paul, in the forecited seventh chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians, verse 10. declareth, that *godly sorrow worketh Repentance to salvation, a Repentance not to be repented of*: perhaps the words more properly signify, such a Repentance as implies in it no occasion for Repentance, afterwards; such a Repentance as implies in it a conduct and behaviour, of which there is no reason to repent. And he goes on, in the next verse, to prove their sorrow for having offended to be sincere, and genuine; not from their words, but from their actions and behaviour:

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by which only it was that he judged that they *sorrowed after a godly sort.*

But what need I appeal to him? We ourselves are judges of this matter, if we be not foolishly partial to ourselves, by our intimate acquaintance with the springs, and frame, of human nature. There are none of us all, who, in the case of other persons, do not constantly judge of the bent of their inward thoughts, and the sincerity of their outward professions, by their actions and behaviour; and by these only. In any matters that concern ourselves, we never take the professions of others concerning their inward disposition towards us, to be the true representations of them, unless we see the fruits, and effects, which, in such cases we cannot help judging, would follow upon such dispositions of mind. How then can we possibly think ourselves sincere in our sorrow, and inward Repentance towards God; whilst we see them void of those good effects, by which only they are as certainly known amongst men themselves, as a good tree is known by the fruit it produceth?

And if we proceed in our enquiries, and examine farther into the constitution of our own natures; we shall find that all the powers and faculties of our minds were given us for no other purpose, but to regulate our behaviour, and conduct; and that they are all of no account, but as tending, and employed, that way. We never think any persons arrived at the use of their inward faculties, till they are fit to act, and shew themselves in the world: and we ne-

ver judge any to be prudent, or imprudent ; mad, or sober within ; but by their outward conduct and demeanor. What signify all our inward powers ? Of what importance is it, to judge and determine within our own minds ; to reflect and censure our own actions ; unless it be in order to have an influence upon them ? As sure, therefore, as it is, that any person hath a power within, to judge which way of action is best : so sure is it, that this power could be given for nothing, but to determine his actions the best way. As sure as it is that we have, all of us, a conscience, or reason, to direct us before we act, and to applaud, or condemn us afterwards : so sure is it, that this hath solely a respect to our actions, and behaviour. If therefore, we cannot but reflect with sorrow, and concern, upon some part of our behaviour ; which we find contradictory to the laws of reason, and of God : it is certain that this very power of reflection was designed to influence our behaviour for the time to come. For, to be sorry for any part of our behaviour, implies in it that it was unbecoming, or sinful ; and to account it unbecoming, or sinful, implies in it that it ought never to be practised again : and so it cannot be, but that this inward affection must be designed for the alteration of what is amiss in us.

And if to this we add a consideration or two, upon the nature of Almighty God ; we shall find it yet more certain. For, his nature being all perfection ; there cannot be an higher indignity offered to him, than to suppose that our sorrow,



sorrow, or grief, which is, in the degree of it, misery itself, is for its own sake acceptable to him. No, if we think rightly of him; we cannot but think that bare sorrow is what he rather dislikes, than likes: but that it is that *godly sorrow* only, which worketh amendment, and alteration, that is approved of by him. Can our grief, or sorrow, advantage him? Or, can any thing of ours affect him? No, but it is only, as our grief may advantage ourselves; and as our sorrow may lead us to avoid all occasions of such sorrow for the time to come; that it can be well-pleasing in his eyes.

Will you then judge from the nature of man? You see, all the inward movements of his mind are calculated for nothing but to influence and govern his behaviour: and so, a sorrow without an effect of it upon his life, must be as insignificant, in his own account, as the faculty of reasoning itself, separated from all effect upon his conduct, and behaviour. Or, will you judge of this matter from the nature of God Almighty? He cannot take any pleasure in our sorrow; but as it tends to our real joy and happiness. It can be of no account in his eyes; but as it makes us better, and wiser, for the future.

Or lastly, will you judge of it from the great design of Christianity? How unworthy must you think it of God, to send his Son into the world, to live, and dye, in order to lead men to a bare, pretended, sorrow, and grief for their sins? Is it not the doing his Father's will, which he presseth upon his disciples? Is it not declared, that the *grace of God appeared to men*

*in the gospel, to teach them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts ; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this world ? And is it not to contradict all this, in the most flagrant manner, to imagine that the end of Christ's coming could be, to lead men only to a little vain empty sorrow ? That is, to lead men to what doth, in its own nature, aggravate their guilt, if they stop at it, without proceeding any farther. Aggravate their guilt, I say : for when we are sorrowful on account of our sins ; this sorrow supposeth in it that we ought not to commit them ; and that there is a foul evil, and guilt in them : and this tacit acknowledgment that their nature is foul, and evil, and makes us guilty before God, cannot but help to condemn us for returning to what we ourselves think so blame-worthy. So that when we have opportunity to do better, and do not ; but return again to the same sins that we think deserve, and call for, our sorrow ; we are self-condemned. The sorrow, by which we hope to cover them, must help to make them the more meritorious of punishment : as it implies in it self-condemnation, and an acknowledgment of guilt. But when it leads to amendment, and a gradual increase in virtue ; then only is it the parent of good fruit, lovely in the eyes of God, and pleasing in the reflection of the man himself. How plain, therefore, is it, if we will but consider things, as they truly are, in their nature, and consequences, that the Repentance of Christians, who have been sinners, necessarily implies in it,*

an actual forsaking of their sins, and an actual progress in all virtue, and godliness of living.

II. Having thus given as true, and as plain, an account, as I could, of the Repentance which alone can avail any professed Christians; I shall now only make two or three short inferences from what I have laid down, with respect to those mistaken Notions by which many Christians deceive themselves in this affair. And,

1. From what hath been said we see the vanity, and misery, of those who place their hopes of acceptance with God, upon the sorrow, and grief, which they sometimes conceive for their sins; and call by the name of Repentance, because, in our language, when we are sorry for any past part of our conduct, we are said to repent of it. If a man, proposing to himself to travel to a place at some distance from his present station, should conclude himself to be arrived at it, when he had set but one step out of his own home; and there make a full stop, contented, and satisfied that this would be sufficient: would you not think such a person dis-tempered in his brain? Why, just thus it is in the case we are considering. We pretend to be travelling towards happiness: and Repentance, in all its parts, is the road to this happiness. The first step, in this road, is sorrow for our sins. He that stops at this sorrow, therefore, and rests himself contented with it, stops at the first step in his journey: and how likely he is to arrive at his journey's end, you may easily judge.



2. Thus again, if the second step be a good disposition of mind to go forwards ; he that stops, without putting in execution this disposition, is still as unlikely to arrive at the end proposed. This is another mistake of men in this affair, that a present good disposition, and resolution of mind, is sufficient for their purpose. But certainly, it is not going one step, or two steps, that will bring us to the end of our spiritual journey ; but the proceeding as far as time, and strength, give leave.

3. From what hath been said, we are led not to place any hopes in what we call a Death-bed Repentance: for this Repentance, extorted from us by the prospect of death, can be only a sorrow for sin ; perhaps rendered more passionate by our present fears. And this being only sorrow, and compunction, and perhaps a good resolution ; it is plain that still these are only the first steps in the Repentance of a sinner ; and not complete Repentance, in all its parts. I confess these are not ill signs : but it ought plainly to be declared that sorrow, and good words, are not the end of the gospel institution ; but an holy life and conversation. Indeed, where a person hath had no calls to Repentance and amendment before ; but been inevitably blinded by unhappy circumstances of education, and hardly known what the gospel pretends to : if such a person be awakened by his danger into serious enquiries, and an hearty conviction of the truth of the gospel ; and a great detestation of his former courses ; one might reasonably hope good things. But in the case  
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of most professed Christians, who are called, day after day, to amendment, and have all the arguments imaginable represented to them; and yet, day after day, shut their ears; spend all that time and health, which God allows them, in vice and iniquity; and then at last are sorry for this, when God thinks fit to try them no longer: in such case, I say, all that can be said is, that they are sorrowful for their sins; and that if that sorrow be sincere, they are got one step towards happiness. But to give greater hopes; or to say that they are the Christians whom God hath declared, he will accept, in his Gospel, is to render vain all the threatnings of his Son; to place the sinner and the saint upon equal terms; to put all upon a man's having a little longer sickness than his neighbour: and to undo the great design of reforming men's lives, the only end worthy of the Son of God's incarnation.

The result of the whole, is this. Since almighty God hath plainly declared, in his Gospel, what it is he expects of those who have been sinners; I need not tell you, how great a weakness, and how extreme a folly, it is, to have recourse to vain, and flattering hopes of our own. Since we are Christians, and have a Gospel open to us, to have recourse to, upon this occasion; it is the greatest weakness imaginable to consult our own passions and our own lusts, what it is fit to for us to hope for, at the hands of God. And yet, I am persuaded this is the case. Were not men inwardly captivated to some vice; covetousness, or ambition,

bition, or sensuality; there would not be any thing, in the nature of things, more evident to themselves, than that Almighty God cannot be supposed to accept any thing at our hands, without a sincere amendment of what we know, and acknowledge, to be amiss in ourselves. And yet, such is the effect of our own evil habits, and the prevalence of our beloved vices; that we first desire, and at last come really to hope, to be accepted for some superficial circumstance, without a real reformation of our lives.

But how long will men thus deceive themselves, in a case in which all deceit is the ruin of soul and body for ever; and in which they can impose upon none but themselves? *Behold, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This was plain under the law. How much more plain under the Gospel? As we are Christians, we are not so much as supposed to be sinners. But if we have transgressed against the plainest light; God is so merciful as to allow a place for reconciliation to his favour, upon our amendment. Is this so hard a condition? Is this so great an injury to us, that we should turn against it, and abuse the Gospel to our own destruction? *Shall the goodness, and long-suffering of God, instead of leading us to true Repentance, only lead us to a false image of it; and to treasure up wrath to ourselves against the day of wrath? Shall we continue in sin; and pretend that sorrow for it is sufficient? God forbid! How shall we, Christians, who, by our profession, are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*



*therein?* Let not such an use be made of our great Lord's indulgent kindness to us in the Gospel: but let all who know what Repentance is, and what it implies in it, live worthy of that Repentance, by which they hope for salvation; and of that *vocation wherewith they are called*.

In a word: if you will have *your sins blotted out*; you must *repent, and be converted*, in the words of the text: that is, actually turned from them. If you have been wilful, habitual sinners; and think of being saved by Repentance; here is the line marked out. The first step is sorrow for your sins; but it is but the first. The second is a disposition to amend your lives. But there is no stopping here. You cannot think this sorrow, and this disposition, sincere, unless they shew themselves in good effects. There must be an actual amendment; an actual entering upon, and progress in a virtuous and holy life; whilst God gives opportunity. Without this, there is not the least security of happiness: and, if you trust to any other methods, you rely upon other terms than what are proposed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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# S E R M O N XXII.

The Christian Life described.

By Archbishop HORT.

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TITUS ii. 11, 12.

*For the grace of God that bringeth Salvation,  
hath appeared to all men ;  
Teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and  
worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously  
and godly in this present world.*

**B**Y the grace of God we are to understand in this place, as in many others, the gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which is the highest manifestation of the grace and favour of God, that was ever made to mankind. For here only we learn that *God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Here only we learn that God will pardon our sins, and restore us to his favour, upon our sincere repentance and amendment. Here only it is that life and immortality, things  
unheard

unheard of before, or at least but obscurely hinted, and rather wished for than believed by the wisest men both Jews and Gentiles, are brought to light. And here only are to be found the assurances of a resurrection to a life of glory and felicity, which God who cannot lye hath promised to all good men.

Before this time, the grace and favour of God were limited to particular persons or families in the patriarchal ages, and afterwards to a particular nation; but the grace of God in the gospel *bringeth salvation to all men*, to every nation and country under heaven, and to every man who is ready to embrace it upon terms that are highly reasonable, and practicable, and these we learn in my text, *viz. the denying of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*

In which words the duty of every man who would become a good Christian, is laid down according to its natural order and progression. He must begin with denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts. Every kind of wickedness being a transgression of God's law, is in strictness of speech ungodliness, or a want of due regard to God; and as this is always practised at the instigation of men's appetites and lusts, the first step to be taken in a religious course is to resolve to deny these. For *every one that nameth the name of Christ*, i.e. who would become a good Christian, is required in the first place to depart from iniquity. When this resolution is taken up at the time of repentance, the next step is to set about the practice of all virtue by  
*living*



*living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*

In these last words, the great and essential parts of the Christian Life are summarily laid down, and distinguished according to their respective objects : with regard to our own selves, it is sobriety ; with regard to other men, it is righteousness ; and with regard to God, it is godliness.

I shall speak to each of these in their order, beginning,

1st, With sobriety. This virtue consists chiefly in the government of our sensual appetites and inclinations, which are the chief instruments that betray us into these irregularities that are contrary to sobriety. *For every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed ; then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.* In other places they are called the *lusts of the flesh*, because they rise originally from the constitution of the body ; but through habit and long indulgence, they may at last strike root into the very soul, and by an unnatural operation corrupt her spiritual faculties. This is the perfection of wickedness, to be wicked in spite of nature, and to transplant evil appetites and desires into the mind, after the powers of the body are decayed, and can nourish them no longer. It is not altogether improbable that this degree of impurity may be the means of perpetuating its own punishment, and is partly meant by the *worm that never dies* ; for unlawful desires being thus propagated into the soul, and cherished by memory, must be a constant source of uneasiness,

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when there are neither bodily powers, nor objects fit to gratify them.

But be this as it will, the sobriety enjoined in the text is the only remedy against all the mischiefs and dangers of our sensual appetites; I shall select three of them, as being the principal ones that are apt to betray men into excess.

The 1st is, The appetite for meat and drink; in regard to which sobriety consists in temperance, or the denial of our palates.

The 2d is, The appetite for continuing the species, called concupiscence; and here sobriety is another name for chastity.

The 3d is, The appetite for riches; and here sobriety is contentment.

1st, The appetite for meat and drink was implanted in our natures, to excite us to take that nourishment which is necessary for the preservation of health and life. The constant wastes in all animal bodies caused by action and transpiration, is so great, that without fresh recruits they must soon starve and perish. It was therefore a very wise provision of the creator, to put into all living creatures a strong desire of food, which should make them uneasy and impatient under the want of it, and excite them to seek it where it may be had. Were it not for this, the whole race of animals would consume and die miserably in a few days. And I am afraid the same thing would happen to men as well as beasts; for after all, we see that the cravings of a hungry stomach are barely sufficient to provoke a slothful man to industry,  
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and that he will be half starved before he can be brought to labour for his bread.

For this reason, I say, it was a very wise provision of the Creator to put into us these importunate cravings, that will not let us rest till they are satisfied. And if the goodness of God had stopped here, and provided us necessary food only, there had been no cause of complaint ; but he has proceeded further, and made ample provision for the comfort and pleasure as well as the support of our lives, for he has created delicacies, and mixed up with our aliments an infinite variety of agreeable flavours and relishes to gratify the senses, and excite the appetite when it becomes weak and languid. Besides *bread to strengthen the heart*, has given *wine that maketh glad the heart of man*, and *oil to make his face to shine*.

But our daily observation shews that these good things which were designed to give us innocent pleasure, are through the corruption of our natures abused, and made the occasions of gluttony and drunkenness, and all kinds of intemperance, to the dishonour of God, and the reproach of our reasonable natures. This was the corrupt state of the world in St. Paul's time, as he largely shews in his epistles ; and therefore he labours every where to prove, that Christianity is a religion that requires great purity of life and manners, and allows no such things as gluttony and drunkenness, and intemperance of any kind, but that Christians must become *new creatures* ; and put off concerning the former conversation the old man which



*which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Not living after the flesh, but through the spirit mortifying the deeds of the body.* The meaning of these, and many other passages of the same kind, is, that Christians must not give way to all the cravings of their sensual appetites, in point of meats and drinks, but must govern, and restrain them within the strict rules of sobriety and temperance. It was our Saviour's own charge to his followers, *Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.* And St. Paul exhorts the Romans *to walk honestly as in the day; i. e. as those who are not ashamed of what they are doing, not in rioting and drunkenness, but to put on the Lord Jesus Christ; by imitating his strict virtue and sobriety, and to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.* And to name no more, he warns the Ephesians against drunkenness and revelings, declaring *that they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

It is difficult, I confess, to fix the precise limits of sobriety with regard to eating and drinking, because they are not the same to every man, and cannot therefore be prescribed by weight and measure. One man's stomach may be oppressed and surfeited with that which the constitution and health of another justly demands; and the same proportion of wine that is barely sufficient to glad the heart of one man, and make him innocently chearful, shall get into another man's head, and disturb

his reason. Every man therefore must so far judge for himself, and find out by his own experience what are the bounds of temperance with regard to him. But yet there is one general rule that extends to all, and this is to beware of approaching too near to the limits of vice, for fear of being caught unawares through the treachery of our hearts, and the force of temptations. For sobriety with respect to eating and drinking, may perhaps lye within streighter bounds than we are aware of. St. Paul describes gluttons under that short character that *their God is their belly*. And of whom can this more properly be said than of those who place their chief happiness in eating and drinking, and who hunt for delicacies and dainties, to gratify a wanton palate at any price, even to the impairing of their fortunes, the ruin of their families, and the utter neglect of charity to the poor? For what is to be accounted any man's God, but that to which he sacrifices all he has, not excepting his health and life, and even his very soul. This therefore is no less gluttony than the overcharging his stomach; and yet I believe they generally go together, for the delicious qualities of food are the strongest temptation to exceed in the quantity.

But the other vice of drunkenness is more easily known and distinguished, because it speaks itself, and is written in legible characters in the eyes, and the tongue, and the feet, and almost every part of the body, besides the effect it has in unhinging the reason, and trans-

transforming the man into a very brute, and a wise man into a fool. If therefore gluttony be a sin hard to be defined and detected, yet the case is not so with drunkenness, and if it were, yet this odious vice, contrary to the nature of all others, foolishly affects to shew itself, when it ought rather to hide its head for very shame.

I will not deny that drunkenness is often unpremeditated, and that beginning in meer good fellowship, it creeps on gradually without being perceived, stealing away consciousness with every step it takes; but this can be no excuse, for every man knows the consequence beforehand, and that though it begins in good fellowship and cheerfulness, yet it will end in phrenzy and madness. For when reason is once dethroned, and the passions inflamed and let loose, they will hurry him into all sorts of wickedness and mischief. And it will be too late when the work is done, to plead that he is sorry for it, and did not know what he was a doing, for he was in senses before he was drunk, and had then power to keep himself sober and harmless. It is not the lion, but the man who unchains him, that must answer for the mischiefs that follow.

There is hardly a glutton or a drunkard who does not repent the next morning after a debauch; but as such repentance is commonly the effect of an aking head, or a loathing stomach, it is apt to vanish together with those symptoms, and is without merit, and without reformation. It may, and it must come to a real repentance before it be long; for when the



constitution is broken, and the powers of being intemperate fail, and death hastened by fast living comes in sight, a man can hardly help repenting, but then it will come too late, because it cannot be approved by amendment of life. The voluptuous man in the gospel is a moving spectacle of this kind. *He went clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*, insomuch that he could spare nothing from his luxury for relieving Lazarus, who lay perishing at his gate; but the next time we hear of him was from hell, where he is piteously begging for a drop of water from the hand of this same Lazarus, to cool his tongue.

Let Christians who indulge their appetites in drunkenness and gluttony consider this, and learn to prevent a late repentance by restraining their lusts, and living up to the purity of their profession, which requires them to *deny all ungodliness and worldly lust, and live soberly in this present world*; for of all vices there are none more contrary to Christian sobriety than these.

I come,

2dly, To that appetite which the Creator implanted in the whole race of animals, for the continuation of their species, to the end of the world. Sobriety with regard to this, is chastity, and the abuse of it is called concupiscence in the holy Scriptures.

If this appetite in mankind were to be left at large, many inconveniencies and mischiefs must follow; the alliances of families, and the ties of blood and kindred must cease; inheritance and property would be confounded; the  
 endear-

endearments that are peculiar to conjugal affection, and the mutual fidelity betwixt husband and wife established on solemn sponfions, and secured by one common interest, would be greatly missed in social life; the education of children must be neglected, and the comfort of them could subsist but for a little while; for as children would be at a loss to know their own fathers, and fathers, their own children, and both male and female would be continually changing their attachments, all parental and filial affections would of course be at an end. In short, the race of mankind would be so disunited and blended, that the world must soon run into infinite confusions and disorders.

For these reasons God hath wisely laid this appetite under strict restraints, and ordained the holy state of matrimony, that one man and one woman, forsaking all others, should live together in inviolable union and affection, and that the human race should be perpetuated in this way, and under this limitation only, and that all other offspring should be spurious and dishonourable.

It appears from the second chapter of Genesis, that this was the first law which God made for the benefit of mankind, and that in order to give it a real foundation in nature, the first wife was formed out of the very substance of her husband's body. *She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man; therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.* This law was undoubtedly

handed down by tradition, and established by constant usage among Adam's descendents, who, after the memory of the first institution was lost, continued the practice from the experience of its usefulness. And this plainly accounts for the universal custom of marriage over the whole world, not excepting the most ignorant and savage nations. But this fence of chastity was not long kept entire; for as the world fell into corruption, and men gave a loose to their wanton appetites, great breaches were made in it by polygamy and concubinage, by which means one man assumed to himself the property of many women contrary to the law of equity, and to the plain intention of providence in supplying nearly an equal number of each sex, that so male and female might be linked together by pairs in matrimony.

This unequal distribution prevailed for many ages, and produced infinite jealousies and disturbances in families; but as the fences were never quite plucked up, nor the field laid open and common to promiscuous love, and there were always claims of property, and certain restraints in favour of chastity and fidelity, this is no small attestation to the wisdom and purity of the ordinance of holy matrimony.

But when the Christian religion took place, it again made up the original enclosure of chastity, and laid a severe restraint upon this licentious appetite by limiting one woman to one man, and forbidding all impure commerce, under the highest penalties. *Be not deceived,*  
says



says St. Paul, *neither fornicators, nor adulterers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* And he declares to the Hebrews, *That whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* And to the Thessalonians, *This is the will of God even your sanctification, that ye should avoid fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the gentiles which know not God, for God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness.*

And the gospel carries this point still higher, extending chastity to our words as well as actions; forbidding all corrupt communication to proceed out of our mouths, and all foolish talking and jesting, because these are apt to inflame unlawful desires. And it proceeds to lay restraints even upon the eye, and the very thoughts, beyond which moral purity cannot go. *But I say unto you,* says our blessed Saviour, *that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

These are the restraints which the gospel has laid upon this unruly appetite; and they are refinements of purity and chastity, that escaped the best of the heathen moralists, who carried it no further than to correct the gross and external acts; but the chastity of the heart was a degree of virtue reserved for the religion of Jesus Christ.

The third and last appetite I shall mention, is that which has riches for its object, with regard to which sobriety lies in contentment.

This is rather a false and fictitious appetite of men's own making, than a natural one implanted in us by our Creator.

The desire of all those things that are necessary for the support and comfort of life is natural and reasonable, and therefore may lawfully be gratified by honest means. And these things were the riches of the early and more innocent ages of the world. But since the invention of money, the object of this desire has been changed from lands and possessions which are intrinsically good and useful, to gold and silver which have only a denominative value put upon them by compact.

This change of the object has greatly increased the desire, by reducing wealth into a narrow compass, and bringing it under the eye, and into the hand and personal custody of the owner. The riches in flocks and herds that covered ten thousand acres in the days of the patriarchs, may now lie within the space of a square yard, or even in the pocket of a miser; and this is a very strong temptation to him to accumulate without end, when he can so easily dispose of it, and so readily come at it to please his fancy.

One great pretence of covetousness is the making a provision for men's families; and if this be the true end, and pursued by honest means without robbing the poor of their share of charity, and withholding from mankind that beneficence which they may upon many occasions justly claim, the design is virtuous and laudable. But I fear it is too often a meer pre-  
text

text to cover avarice : for we frequently see the childless and the friendless as intent upon heaping up riches, as those who have heirs.

I must confess that this appetite for money may not at the first sight seem contrary to the sobriety recommended in the text ; for covetous men are most remarkable for their sobriety and temperance, and the reason is plain, because our sensual appetites are extravagant things, and cannot be indulged to the full without great expence. It is not therefore out of meer virtue that covetous men are abstemious, but to save their money ; this is their prevailing taste, and they will pinch and deny themselves even the necessaries of life to gratify it. The fear of want may sometimes be really at the bottom, but surely nothing can be more absurd than for a man to be in want all his life for fear of wanting ; and why should he be afraid of wanting more than he does, who always wants what he really has ?

As little therefore as this vice of covetousness may in appearance be contrary to sobriety, yet it is really quite inconsistent with it, because it is a stranger to contentment, and never thinks it has enough ; it is an appetite that daily grows, and the more it is fed, the more it craves ; and even old age, which abates other appetites, is apt to encrease this. And tho' it cannot be charged with gluttony and drunkenness, and other pleasurable vices, yet it is too prone to those of a different class, and which are more injurious to other men ; for such oppression, exaction, cheating, want of charity to the poor,  
and



and of beneficence to mankind, and of a contented spirit; these are the natural companions of avarice, for which reason it is ranked among the blackest vices in the holy Scriptures. The Psalmist says of a covetous man, that he is one *whom the Lord abhorreth*. St. Paul declares, *that no covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*, and reason good, for it is the only inheritance he never coveted. And he explains the reason to Timothy, *But they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves thorough with many sorrows*.

I cannot forbear to rank under this appetite for money, the love of gaming. I do not mean that profligate sort which is made a profession, and is carried to the excess of winning or losing estates; but I speak of that more reputable kind that has by degrees crept into the best companies, and obtained a sort of sanction from the practice of persons justly to be esteemed and imitated in other respects. Recreations that are in themselves innocent, may become faulty by their circumstances. If they eat up too much of our time which ought to be more profitably employed; if they betray us into unseasonable hours, to the neglect of our family cares, and perhaps our devotions; if they get such hold of our hearts that we are miserable when a party happens to be broke, and count it an evening

evening lost if it be not devoted to play, these are violent symptoms that the love of money is a prevailing ingredient in the mixture, and that recreation is not the first thing in view, for if it were, a very trifle of loss or gain would answer that end, and keep up the spirit and attention ; but when a little makes the business go on heavily, and more will enliven it, this is a clear proof, that this same more is the first motive.

In a word, the love of money when it is inordinate, and engrosses our affections, and time, and pursuits, to the neglect of any duty towards God and our neighbours, or families, cannot be reconciled with that sobriety which is required in all Christians ; for it must appear in the government of every appetite ; and as this is an appetite of dangerous consequence, it cannot be privileged above the rest.

The second division of our Christian duty is, to *live righteously in this present world*. And this is a duty of great extent, reaching to all our dealings with men.

For righteousness requires us to be fair and equal in all contracts and agreements, taking no advantage of the ignorance, or weakness, or necessities of our neighbours, and to be punctual in making them good, not adhering to the bare letter of obligations, but fulfilling the mutual intention, and calling our own conscience to be evidence for him when there are no other witnesses.

Righteousness requires us to *render to all their dues* ; not only debts in law, but in equity  
and

and good conscience (for there is no difference between those two in point of religion) and to do this chearfully, without compulsion, and readily without having recourse to evasions and tricks of law to create delay ; for there is no honesty in paying debts, when a man cannot help it, and he is not the less a knave for doing justice when he is drove out of all his strong holds, and forced to it ; and even delay is injustice because it is vexatious and expensive, and will hurt the creditor in his circumstances. And yet to the great shame of our country, too much of this injustice is found among us, and we may take to ourselves that odious reproach of the prophet, *The spoil of the poor is in your houses* ; for how can we call it by a better name when we see luxury in dress, and furniture, and equipage, and splendid tables supplied by poor tradesmen, who are unmercifully kept out of their money, till they are ruined and undone by supporting the vanity of those who despise them ?

But the gospel teaches Christians another kind of lesson ; *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another*, is one of the great laws of Christianity. The meaning is, that Christians must make it a point of conscience to pay their just debts to every man chearfully, and without putting him to recover it at law with cost and trouble. But there is one debt which we must owe, and that is love to one another. This is the only debt that is never to be finally discharged and balanced, and therefore that account must be always kept open ; it is a debt  
that



that Christians must be always paying and yet always owing ; and the good of it is, that it will secure all other debts ; for he that owes love to his neighbour will take care to owe him nothing else, but will pay him out of meer benevolence, *for love is the fulfilling of the whole law.*

Further. It is a point of righteousness to avoid contracting debts beyond what we are worth, and may never be able to pay ; for this is to run the risque of being dishonest, and to abuse the confidence which we have persuaded other men to repose in us. And it is rather worse after we have contracted debts, to disable ourselves for paying them by unnecessary expences and extravagancies, which istoo often the practice of borrowers ; in that case we spend what we know is not our own, but the property of another, and how does this differ from robbery or picking a pocket, only that is not indictable.

Another branch of righteousness relates to the good name and credit of our neighbour, which may be as valuable to him as his money, and is many times the only estate he has.

There is a great tenderness due to the good name of every man, unless to direct profligates who proclaim their own shame and have no credit to lose ; and to go about to rob him of this by private whispers and insinuations, is like a stab in the back, for he has no opportunity of making his defence. If he should be a man in business, it may deprive him and his family of their bread ; for the mischief is soon done,

done, and repentance will come too late, for when slander is once given out, it runs and spreads apace, and is hard to be recalled.

It is therefore a most unrighteous as well as uncharitable office to blast the credit of any man, and especially when his dealings in the world depend much upon it. Such a whisper is as wicked as those merciless thieves in the parable, who not content to rob and strip the poor Samaritan, wounded him, and left him half dead.

And if Christian righteousness extends to the good name and property of our neighbour, much more must it extend to his life, and health, and limbs, for these are still more precious to him; and therefore of all kinds of injustice, none are so cruel as those that tend to destroy or hurt these, for which it is impossible to make him reparation.

And this leads me to speak of duelling, which is a practice never to be reconciled with the principles of Christianity, nor even with moral virtue, or common sense.

For what can be more contrary to the nature of righteousness, than for a private man to take upon himself to be a judge, and not only so, but an executioner, in his own cause? Not a cool and indifferent, but a passionate and exasperated judge, not in a slight and trifling matter, though the occasion is too often such, but where the sentence is no less than death?

The common plea for this practice too much connived at, is the vindication of injured honour: this may sometimes happen to be the

real motive, but I am afraid that it often proceeds rather from revenge and a thirst of blood, and that honour is only used as a pretext to cover it.

But let us suppose the best ; what is this idol called honour, to which so many sacrifices are offered up ? Is it any thing of our own ? Just the contrary, for it can never come into our own power and possession. The honour that a man gives to himself is foolish and ridiculous, and therefore the present question is concerning the good opinion that other men have of his courage and bravery ; this is the honour he must defend with his life, so that this precious jewel must always remain in the power and custody of other people, who will judge of him just as they please, and according to their particular notions and humours.

The men who make light of bloodshed, and have little else besides honour in their heads, will applaud him for a gallant man ; and so will the mob, who admire nothing so much as the courage of brute animals in tearing one another to pieces ; and if these latter could speak, they would perhaps say, that they likewise fight for their honour. But all wise and considering men will condemn his cruelty and injustice in attempting the life of his neighbour for a rude word, or a hasty stroke, and his absurd folly in putting himself on the level with his adversary, and taking an equal chance for his life, in order to gain the victory over him. And all men of virtue and religion will call it a savage and inhuman principle, contrary  
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to justice, and goodness, and charity, and every amiable quality of human nature.

Since therefore honour truly consists in the opinion and esteem that other men have concerning us, and this is a various thing, where shall we fix the standard of it, and by whose opinion must we be governed? Surely there can be no doubt but the wise, and the sober, and the virtuous part of mankind must carry it; and these are all agreed, that the practice of duelling is built upon false, mistaken, and ill-judged notions of honour at the very best, and that when it is accompanied with revenge and a thirst for blood, it is monstrously wicked.

And indeed the sentiments of men most celebrated for wisdom in all ages, have placed honour on the contrary side, and made it to consist in a greatness of mind that is above being moved at indignities, and considers them as proofs of folly, and want of understanding in those who offer them without cause, and that what is vulgarly esteemed spirit in resenting affronts, is at the bottom a weakness in men who are unable to govern their own passions. This is the sense of that wisest of all mortal men Solomon, who knew the world and the nature of mankind perfectly well; *The discretion of a man*, says he, *deferreth his anger*, that is, he will take time to consider what is his best course, and when he is cool he will find that *it is his glory to pass over a transgression*. To the same purpose is that passage in the 16th ch. v. 32. *He that is slow to anger is better than*  
*the*

*the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.* The meaning is, that there is more true courage and honour in ruling our own passions, and keeping the mind calm and unruffled under provocations, than in gaining battles and sieges.

If this be a true account of the nature of that honour which is now in question, if it lies only in the good opinion which other men conceive of our behaviour either in sending or accepting challenges, the question lies in a short compass: honour and reputation must be got and lost, let a man take which side he pleases; if he passes by an indignity, his credit is gone with one set of men; if he resents it, and requires satisfaction, it is lost with another set; and if the latter are the wise and the virtuous, which is universally confessed, then he must be determined by them, unless he gives folly the preference to wisdom.

The fault is indeed, partly in custom, which has established a false notion of honour in many heads, and affixed it to an immoral action; but much more in the law, and those who have the execution of it; for it is a just reproach to all governments to suffer the blood of brave men to be spilt like water for meer words, and it would well become their wisdom to find out some more innocent and harmless expedients for the vindication of injured honour.

This I conceive is the light that duelling ought to be placed in with regard to reason and true wisdom; let us next see how it stands with regard to Christianity. And I hope this is not

entirely to be left out of the question by those who profess themselves to be Christians as well as men of honour; and that having in baptism been listed under Christ's banner, they will not turn cowards, and forsake their colours.

If therefore we look into the gospel we shall find it speaking in quite another strain, breathing nothing but gentleness and sweetness of behaviour. *I beseech you*, says St. Paul, *that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love. Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so do ye.* Here is the spirit and genius of the Christian religion, so beautifully painted, as might make every man in love with it who reads it; and I am persuaded that nobody will undertake to reconcile this with the practice of drawing the sword, in order to kill or wound for an opprobrious word, or a wry face. In the 12th of Romans, 19th verse, the same apostle gives this admonition, *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; that is, do not oppose wrath to wrath, which must end in mischief, but choose rather to bear injuries, and leave the revenge to God whose province it is, according to the words following, For vengeance is mine, and I will repay it, saith the Lord; therefore if thine ene-*  
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*my hunger, feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.* The expression is metaphorical, and may either signify that our kindness and goodness will aggravate his guilt, and render him more obnoxious to the vengeance of God in case of his perseverance, and this seems better to tally with the foregoing words; or else it may be an allusion to the practice of founders, who run down hard metals by placing fire on the top as well as underneath the fining pot; and then the import will be, that by returning good for evil, we shall soften the anger of our enemy, and bring him to a more kind and friendly temper; and this sense of the expression seems better to suit the amiable spirit of Christianity, and the advice immediately following, *be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* The challenger therefore, as much as he may applaud his own bravery, is certainly overcome even before he takes the field; for his own passions, which are his worst enemies, have got the better of him, and hurry him into rashness and mischief that will sooner or later bring him to repentance. On the other hand, he who can be unmoved at indignities, shews the truest fortitude, for he has subdued his own passions, and will, in the end, subdue his enemy also, and disarm him by his wisdom and virtue.

I could therefore wish that our gallant spirits would consider these things when affronts are broiling in their stomachs, and their blood is

kindling to draw the sword for an ill chosen, or ill understood word; let them weigh the folly and danger of giving or accepting a challenge, which may end in immediate death, or the loss of health and limbs on one side or other, and perhaps of both. To fall in the defence of our country, our religion, and our liberty, is true bravery and glory, and such merit will not be lost; but what comfort can be given where death ensues upon a duel by appointment? The survivor, however he may gloss away his crime, is no better than a murderer; juries may perhaps call it by the soft name of manslaughter, but at the grand assizes before the great judge, no distinction of that kind will be allowed. He may indeed live to repent, as most men do when the mischief is done, and their passions subside; but that any wilful murderer shall obtain mercy, is no clear case, because it is out of his power to make any reparation.

But what will become of the wretch that falls; his case is indeed deplorable, for he dies in the very act of wickedness, and therefore his repentance is utterly impossible.

The last branch of Christian righteousness I shall take notice of is almsgiving; and I call this righteousness, because it is properly a debt. This doctrine may at first sight appear new, charity being always supposed to be a free gift; but yet nothing is more clear and certain. No man has the absolute property of his estate, and when he calls it his own it only denotes  
his

his property against all other men ; but with respect to God it is a property meerly dependent and by courtesy. *For all the beasts of the forest are mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. The world is mine, and the fulness thereof,* says he. And it is impossible to be otherwise ; for he who gave us our beings, must have an indefeasible right in us, and in all that belongs to us ; we are therefore no better than stewards or cashiers, and hold our wealth subject to his orders, and every fit object of charity that providence throws in our way, comes with a bill drawn upon us by our great Lord and Master, payable out of his cash lying in our hands.

In this respect therefore charity is a debt which no man of ability can refuse to pay without doing wrong. The wise man considereth it as such in that admonition, *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.* And our blessed Saviour puts the case in the same light, when he describes the proceedings of the last judgment, where every man must account for the profits of his estate. He introduces the king as passing sentence upon the hard-hearted and uncharitable, in these words. *Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire ; giving this for a reason, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me.* Your estates and worldly wealth were mine, and in refusing to relieve their wants, you refuse my order.



Our master has indeed no where described every particular object of our charity, nor limited the precise quantity of it. These are left to every man's discretion and conscience, who must judge for himself, both in regard to these, and to his own circumstances, and so far charity may be called a free gift. But to give, or not to give at all, is left to no man's discretion who has wherewithal to do it. *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a chearful giver.* But lest this should be taken for a dispensation from the duty, where the purpose or inclination of heart was wanting, he premises those words, *But this I say, he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.* That every one would sow his charity, he no more doubted, than that every one will sow his land; but he makes use of the allusion of sowing, in order to excite them to be liberal, for to pinch their charity, would be just such foolish husbandry, as for a farmer to spare his seed, and starve his crop. But, however, it is better to give grudgingly than not to give at all, for the good work is done, and the poor have the same benefit in receiving, though the giver has not the same pleasure in giving: and the ill grace of doing the action, will take off part of the beauty and value of it in the sight of God, *who loveth a chearful giver.*

But still a debt it is, in proportion to the substance which God hath committed to every man's

man's keeping in special trust for this among other uses; and though it be not recoverable by bill or action before earthly courts, yet there lies a dreadful action before the supreme judge at the great tribunal, who will vindicate the cause of paupers, and cast the unprofitable and hard-hearted stewards of his goods into outer darkness.

These are the chief branches of righteousness with regard to our neighbour, which are included under that general head in my text, *living righteously in this present world*, namely,

To pay to every man what we owe him in justice and equity, and to do it chearfully and without compulsion.

To be tender of the credit and good name of our neighbour, avoiding all slander, and even insinuations and whispers that may hurt his reputation, and to defend and justify him as far as truth would permit.

To restrain our passions from committing acts of violence upon his person, and to protect his life, health and limbs, as far as may consist with prudence and safety to ourselves.

And lastly, to relieve his wants by our alms, according to our abilities.

And lest in any cases that may happen, a Christian should be in doubt what may be righteousness, and what not, our blessed Saviour has prescribed a never-failing rule for directing our consciences, though it may not split the hair of justice in critical cases. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should*

*should do unto you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.* This will answer the end of them in all matters of right and wrong. Let a man therefore but once set up this court of chancery in his own breast, and ask his own conscience what he would do, if he stood in the place of the man he has to do with, and he need go to no other oracle to teach him how to be righteous in every case.



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# S E R M O N XXIII.

The Christian Life described.

By Archbishop HORT.

The SECOND PART.

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TITUS ii. 11, 12.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation,  
hath appeared to all men;*

*Teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and  
worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously,  
and godly in this present world.*

HAVING in my former discourse on these words, shewn what is meant by living *soberly* and *righteously*, I come now to the third and most important article of Christian duty, and that is to live *godly*.

This is a subject so very copious and diffusive, that were I to pursue it minutely, it would carry me into every branch of natural and revealed religion; because all religion is founded upon the nature, and relation, and will of God. And could we suppose that there  
was

was no God, there would be an end of all religion at once.

The duties and virtues of the social life might indeed remain, because government could not be preserved, nor men live happily without them; but in that case they would cease to be religion, and become meer prudence and policy; and God knows how weak the ties of human laws and authority would prove for restraining men's unruly wills and tempers, and keeping the world in peace, were it not for the apprehensions of a God, and a future life. But this very supposition of no God is absurd and contradictory, because it implies that I who suppose it, can not possibly exist; for there must be one first and self-existing cause, who gave being to me and to all other creatures.

All religion therefore properly so called, must in the nature of the thing have a necessary relation to God; and every part of it must come within the general expression of my text, of *living godly in this present world*. But this would be too large a field for me to enter upon: I shall therefore limit myself to such particular parts of religion as have God more immediately and expressly for their object, and which I fear are not generally well understood.

In this view, to *live godly*, is in general, to have that habitual sense of the being, attributes, and relations of God, impressed upon our hearts, as shall at all times, and upon all occasions, duly influence, not only our outward behaviour, but even our very thoughts and  
designs;

designs ; such a sense of God as shall prove the great and governing principle through the whole course of our lives, and is never to be laid aside and forgotten, but must incorporate and mix with every part. Hence it is that the general description of a good man is, that he is one *who sets the Lord always before his eyes*. That is, he accustoms himself to meditate upon God, and by frequent contemplation of his infinite perfections, hath imprinted upon his spirit that habitual regard and veneration for God that always remains there, and is easily turned into an actual attention on every fit occasion.

As on the other hand, the character of an irreligious man is, *that God is not in all his thoughts*,, and that he is *without God in the world*, that is, without any sense and remembrance of God, but lives just as if there were no God at all. This in general is to live a godly life ; but as I must be more particular, it implies,

1st, A grateful sense of the many blessings we have received from God who gave us our beings, and so exquisitely contrived our bodies in their members, senses, powers and motions, as to fit them for all the purposes of animal life. And who put into those bodies immortal spirits, endued with those nobler powers of free-will, understanding and memory, which render us intellectual and moral agents, capable of those rational pleasures and enjoyments which no other animal can have any notion of.

Who



Who is our daily benefactor, causing his sun to shine, and his clouds to drop their fatness upon the earth to make it fruitful, and yield us not only necessary nourishment and clothing, but a thousand delights and pleasures to gratify our senses and enliven our spirits.

And above all, who mercifully sent his only Son to save us from endless misery which we had incurred, and to entitle us, upon easy conditions, to new hopes of his favour, and of eternal happiness which we had justly forfeited by our disobedience.

These are instances of mercy and goodness never to be forgotten by us. And indeed it is very strange if they should, when they are daily and hourly renewed. If therefore gratitude be at all a virtue and a duty, it must be due to God in the highest degree, and must be included in the notion of *living godly*.

2dly, A constant dependance and reliance of mind upon God, is another part of *living godly*. This duty arises out of the former. For an uninterrupted experience of goodness for the time past, will naturally create dependence on the same goodness for the time to come: and this, when it is justly grounded, is an act of the highest honour and respect, because it shews a confidence and reliance of soul upon the benignity of the divine nature, which is highly becoming an inferior towards a superior, a creature towards his Creator. And therefore the holy Scriptures abound in exhortations to this duty, as being most acceptable and pleasing to God. *Cast thy burthen upon the Lord*, says the  
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the Psalmist, *and he shall sustain thee. Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every side. And blessed are all they that put their trust in thee.* Our blessed Saviour gives us the ground of this, in the 6th of Matth. 31, 32. *Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye need all these things: and St. Peter puts it on the same foot; Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*

But as this is a very sweet doctrine, that may betray men into idleness, it must ever be administered with correctives and cautions. If God were to rain down food upon us, as he did manna upon the Israelites, or if he should send an angel, as when Lot lingered in Sodom, to rescue us from mischiefs and dangers which our own care and prudence ought to foresee and prevent, these would be delightful things indeed. But God has put the course of the world under a wiser regulation, and expects that we shall use all the means in our power to obtain what we want, and upon this condition to hope for his assistance and blessing; to depend upon him in any other way, is to expect that he will work miracles of goodness to gratify our presumptuous confidence.

The nature therefore of religious dependence upon God, supposes that we use the best means in our power for accomplishing our ends, and that we also pray to him for his assistance and blessing. So that this duty is grounded upon a sense of our natural weakness  
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and disability to supply our own wants, and of God's goodness and readiness, to do it, whenever we apply to him properly. It is a duty that consists not in single acts upon extraordinary occasions of distress, for the worst of men are ready enough to fly to God in their extremity when all other helps fail them, which is a plain confession of their dependence, though there is little virtue in it under that circumstance; but it is a settled habit of mind that will run through the whole course of a godly life. It will operate upon the man of large possessions, as well as on the poor man who has nothing but his daily labour to depend upon; for if the former be less dependent upon men for his subsistence, yet he is not less dependent on the providence of God than the latter. If God should withdraw his warm sun-shine, where would be the produce of his land? Or if he should withhold his kindly showers and dews, how soon would *the heaven over him be as brass, and the earth under him as iron*, Deut. xxviii. 23. And what would ten thousand acres avail, when he must starve in the midst of them? The poor man would then have the better chance, for he could labour with his hands, and a little would content him: but this rich man would find his case the same with the discarded steward in the gospel. *What shall I do? I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed.*

This may serve as a lesson to men of the greatest fortunes to practise an humble dependence upon God for the supports and comforts of their lives, and not to think themselves self-sufficient:



sufficient : and also to the poor not to despond, but to rely on the blessing of God's providence upon their honest labour and industry. And accordingly the rich as well as the poor, are taught in the Lord's prayer to ask their daily bread from their common Father which is in heaven.

The sovereignty of God is likewise the object of this duty of dependence as well as his goodness ; in consequence of which his will and pleasure ought to be the rule of ours. St. James has prescribed the respectful language that Christians ought to use in common discourse with regard to the divine sovereignty. *Go to now*, says he, that is, mark well what I am saying, *Ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, &c.—Whereas ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.* For this is setting up for independent beings, who are intirely at their own disposal, without any regard to the will and pleasure of God. Socrates reads the very same lesson to his pupil Alcibiades, telling him that instead of replying, ' I will do so if you please,' his language should have been, ' I will do it if it be the will of God.' For depend upon God we must whether we will or no, and therefore it is our wisdom as well as virtue to do it with complacency, and turn it into a religious habit of the soul.

3dly, To make the glory of God one great end of our actions, is essential to *living godly*, for this is strictly and properly to live to and for God. To promote the honour of the divine majesty, and propagate the true religion  
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and worship of God in the world; to win men over to the love of virtue and truth, and goodness; to reprove all kinds of vice and immorality, all disrespect and contempt of God and his laws; all false and idolatrous worship; to rectify all unworthy notions that men have conceived of him; to name his holy name with the greatest reverence, and reprove those who use it irreverently and profanely; to give no handles by our own behaviour to atheistical and wicked men to ridicule and condemn Christianity, and no just offence to the weak and well-meaning; to do all this to the utmost of our power and influence, this is to make the glory of God the great end of our lives; and this is one great lesson of our holy religion. *Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit,* says St. Paul, *which are God's. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;* that is, this view must never be laid aside, but must habitually run through all the common and ordinary actions of a Christian's life. For *none of us*, as he tells the Romans, *liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether therefore we live or die, we are the Lord's.*

4thly, To live godly, implies a permanent sense upon our minds of God's infinite presence, by which he has a perfect knowledge of all our actions, and even of our very thoughts and desires. That *his eyes are upon man, and see all his goings*—and that *there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity*  
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*can hide themselves.* The prophet Jeremiah puts this in a very strong light, ch. xvii. v. 9, 10. *The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, Who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins;* and with what intent? To be a curious spectator only? No, but in order to *give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.* It is that he may render a righteous retribution at the last day, where all witnesses will be useless, for God will be both witness and judge. And yet a witness there will be; not to inform the judge as in earthly courts, but to attest and enforce the justice of the sentence upon every man; and this is his own conscience, which will inwardly acquit or convict him *in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ.*

And since God has made the heart the seat of all morality, it is absolutely necessary that he should have a perfect knowledge of all that passes there, in order to be a competent judge, and to give a final sentence and retribution of happiness or misery.

This consideration of God's infinite knowledge, is the immediate foundation of the next branch of a godly life, which is,

5thly, That habitual fear and awe of the divine majesty, that will influence us to an uniform course of virtue and obedience. For this single consideration, if duly attended to, has force sufficient to create in us that *fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom*, and to deter us from all wickedness, be the opportunity



nity never so private, and hidden from the eyes of men; and to excite us to the practice of all righteousness, even to the denial of our most favourite inclinations. I cannot deny but love, gratitude and honour, are more generous and amiable principles of obedience; but experience shews that in this depraved state of human nature, fear is a passion of the strongest operation. And we find it was the first passion that awakened in Adam after his transgression, when he hid himself being afraid; during his innocence it was veneration, but upon this guilt it turned into fear. Not but this fear, after it has struck the first stroke by awakening men to repentance, may mix well with love and gratitude towards God, who is then looked upon in a more amiable light: yet still the habit and impression of it must never be worn out of the soul, but must be revived and called forth into act upon all proper occasions, because it is the most sovereign preservative under temptations. Thus we see that when Joseph found his virtue was near staggering under the solicitations of his mistress, his last refuge was in his fear of God, *How can I do this great wickedness, says he, and sin against God?* His youth, and perhaps her beauty and allurements, her importunity, her authority over her slave, her power to punish him which he soon after felt, all these conspired with the secrecy of the place to defeat his virtue; he pleaded the confidence his master had reposed in him; he urged the gratitude he owed him, but above all, the fear of offending God; it was this that turned the scales, and saved his virtue.

virtue. It is therefore a most wise conclusion of the wisest of men, which sums up his book of Ecclesiastes. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*, says he; *Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* If we would always bear this in our minds, that God is ever present with us to see what we are doing and designing, and that we can never escape his eye, which of us durst do a wicked action, or neglect a good one? Who would not then lead a godly and religious life? Among men indeed, an eye-servant is the character of a bad servant; but if men would once become eye-servants to God, the work of religion would be done at once, for they must be truly good at all times, and in all places.

6thly, A submissive and patient resignation to the will of God under all the troubles and afflictions which he shall think fit to lay upon us, is a very material part of godliness. Such as bodily pains and sickness, the loss of our dearest friends and relations, disappointments in our important designs and expectations, falling into poverty and distress without any fault on our part, sufferings and persecutions from wicked men, and the like.

The great governor of the world takes a thousand things into his view in the scheme of his providence, that do not occur to our narrow and short sighted understandings, and has many

wise and good reasons for afflicting even good men, which we cannot discover, and which will not appear till the winding up of the bottom at last. But then all things will be set straight. *Tho' his judgment be now unsearchable, and his ways past finding out; yet his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is he.* This is a most reasonable and becoming behaviour in every man who professes any regard and veneration for God, and believes that he is perfectly wise and good; for there cannot be a stronger foundation than this for acquiescence in all the divine dispensations. *I was dumb, says the Psalmist, I opened not my mouth, for it was thou didst it. It is the Lord, says Eli, when judgment was denounced against his children, let him do what seemeth him good.* The same pious resignation we find exemplified in holy Job, when his children and all his estate were destroyed at one stroke; *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.*

These good men judged it a sufficient reason to be patient and resigned under their great afflictions, that they were sent upon them by the hand of God, who cannot *willingly afflict, or grieve the children of men*, but has wise and gracious ends of providence to answer, though we cannot always dive to the bottom of them.

7thly, It implies the frequent reading of God's holy word. For this is the great rule of a godly life. *All Scripture, says St. Paul, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable*  
for



*for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Tim. iii. at the end. And in the preceding verse he commends Timothy, that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make him wise to salvation. The Psalmist lays it down as an essential character of a good man; His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And in the 119th Ps. ver. 97th he declares the great pleasure he found in this study, Ob how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Mine eyes prevent the night-watches that I might meditate in thy word, verse 148.*

The reason of this head speaks for itself; for the whole will of God is revealed in his word, and there is nothing necessary to be known, believed or practised, which is not clearly found in these sacred volumes. Nothing therefore can be more absurd than for any man who pretends to christianity and goodness, to be ignorant of the only perfect rule and measure of it. And I am confident that if men of taste and genius, would give themselves the trouble of perusing the holy Scriptures, they would find it by no means that dull book which they take it to be.

The wit of man cannot invent a novel more delicate and moving than the whole story of Joseph. The history of the migration of the Israelites out of Egypt through the Red-sea and the wilderness, and their conquest of the land of promise, is rich with surprising events:

the lives of Christ and his apostles are a series of glorious and astonishing miracles: the book of Job is full of sublime speculations and reasonings: in the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes there is an immense fund of good sense, collected from observations upon human nature, by the wisest man that ever lived. And in our blessed Saviour's discourses and conversations, as also in all the epistles of the new testament, morality and true virtue are carried to such perfection, that the ethicks of the antient philosophers are in comparison of them jejune and insipid. So that there is no book in the whole world so well fitted to instruct and entertain the curious and inquisitive, to satisfy the lovers of knowledge, to improve men in true virtue and goodness, and to teach them the art of living happily in this life and of obtaining everlasting happiness in the life to come, as the Bible. To neglect therefore the reading of this most antient and extraordinary book, this book of God, shews either a disrelish of knowledge, or a depraved taste, and which is the worst of all, a certain want of that godliness, which is the first character of a Christian.

I come next to the 8th and last head of regard due to God; and this consists in the constant performance of divine worship both in private and in publick.

The worship of God is a duty so evident even by the light of nature, that all nations in the world have without any previous compact agreed in the practice of it. And if through ignorance of the pure nature of God, the heathens

thens have corrupted it with many superstitious and impious rites, yet this proves that men will take up with the very worst, rather than have no worship at all. Even the human sacrifices which Cæsar found among the Gauls, and De Solis among the Mexicans, are sufficient to put this matter out of doubt. And if no traces of divine worship have been observed by travellers among certain savages, it may be well accounted for from their ignorance of the languages and manners of such nations. But where these have been understood, some sort of worship has been discovered even among the most barbarous people, sufficient to shew that divine worship is the dictate of natural reason, and a part of that law, which according to St. Paul, *is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.*

But wherever the light of nature hath been improved and assisted in any degree by divine revelation, whether among the Patriarchs, Jews, or converted Gentiles, the true grounds of paying worship to God have appeared in the clearest light. And all unprejudiced men have agreed that the transcendent excellencies of the divine Majesty, his infinite knowledge, and power, and presence, and goodness, render him the only proper object of adoration; and that his relations to us as our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, make it our indispensable duty to worship him and pray to him.

However, in order to guard unwary Christians against fallacious reasonings upon this head, by those who lye in wait to deceive, I



will produce a few clear authorities out of the holy Scriptures for establishing the duty of worshipping God by prayer.

The first is to be found in the 96th Psalm, at the 6th verse. *O come let us worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our maker, —For he is our God.* The next is in that reply of our blessed Saviour to the Devil, when he insolently offered the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, as a bribe if he would fall down and worship him; *For it is written, says our Saviour, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* This authority was so plain and home to the point, that the Devil could find nothing to reply, and immediately left him. The third is that direction of St. Paul to the Philippians before named, ch. iv. 5, 6. *Be careful for nothing, i. e. with anxiety and distrust of providence, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* And to name no more, the same apostle sends this injunction to Timothy, *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* These are plain and undeniable authorities for worshipping God by prayer, and I think that no sober and unprejudiced man who professes Christianity can disallow them.

But lest any doubts shall remain upon a subject of so much importance, I shall consider the exceptions that have been brought against this plain duty.

The

The first is against prayer in general. The second is against the publick and solemn worship of God.

The great exception against prayer in general is, that it is a useless thing.

1st, Because God knows all our wants, and needs not to be told of them by us.

2dly, Because he is infinitely good, and will be ready to supply them, whether we ask or not.

The first of these allegations is grounded upon a meer mistake. For the end of prayer is not at all to inform God of our wants; no man ever thought this who believed the divine omniscience. But it is one thing to want, and another thing to desire and petition for relief. Our wants are involuntary things, which it is often out of our power to satisfy, but our desires and petitions are voluntary acts, and therefore may be good and virtuous, when they are fit and proper. And such they are when by praying to God we express our humble subjection and dependence, our sense of his great goodness and mercy, and our reliance upon his truth in making good his promises; particularly, that of our Saviour in the 7th of Matth. at the 7th verse, *Ask and it shall be given you; for every one that asketh, receiveth*, that is, if the matter, and manner of his prayer be right and fit, it shall be granted.

Prayer therefore, when it is duly qualified, is not only an act of religion and devotion by which God is honoured, but also the proper means of supplying our own wants.

The

The other allegation against prayer, That God being infinitely good will give us all the good things we need without our asking, proceeds from an ignorance of the divine nature ; for it supposes that God is all goodness and nothing else. But God is wise as well as good, and therefore will dispense his goodness by the rules and measures of wisdom, and shew it where it is fit and proper only. And no man can deny but that it is highly fit and proper to pay him the respect of asking humbly what he expects from God.

Let us put ourselves in the case, and we shall see it better. We are secretly pleased with decent praise and respect upon account of any superior talents and merits ; and we may justly expect it, for praise discreetly given where it is due, is no flattery. If we have conferred great benefits upon any man, we claim his thanks and gratitude, and call him ungrateful for refusing it. If he has committed great offences against us, do we not expect that he shall testify his sorrow for what he has done, and beg our pardon ? And if he would have us do him great favours and kindnesses, do we not expect that he should ask us in a becoming manner ? All the world will agree that these things are fit and reasonable ; and if we put God into the case, and suppose him the object, we allow at once the reasonableness of prayer. For to praise him for his glorious excellencies ; to thank him for his great benefits ; to confess our sins and implore his



his mercy and forgiveness; to make our humble supplications to him for the supply of all our wants; this is truly and properly the business of prayer.—The remainder I must defer to another opportunity.

SERMON

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# S E R M O N XXIV.

The Christian Life described.

By Archbishop HORT.

THIRD PART.

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TITUS ii. 11, 12.

*For the-grace of God that bringeth Salvation,  
hath appeared to all men ;  
Teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and  
worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteous-  
ly, and godly in this present world.*

**M**Y former discourse was upon the third and last general division of our Christian duty, expressed under the term of *living godly in this present world*. This I told you, implied among other things not here to be repeated, the constant performance of divine worship, both private and public.

After proving this to be a duty from reason, supported by the practice of all nations, and especially from clear authorities in the holy Scriptures, I came to examine the two great exceptions that have been made against it. The first by our modern infidels against all prayer to God, which they alledge to be quite  
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unnecessary, because he knows our wants before we apply to him, and is, out of his infinite goodness, disposed to supply them whether we ask him or not. This, I conceive, was sufficiently answered in the foregoing discourse.

I come now to answer the other exception, which is against publick prayer, or the solemn worship of God in Christian assemblies on the Lord's-day, and at other stated times. This likewise has been represented by some who would pass for Christians, so long as Christianity is in fashion, as a useless practice, because the private prayer of every man in his closet is in their account sufficient to answer all the purposes of devotion; for which reason they content themselves with this, and see no cause for their repairing to church at the tolling of the bell to pray in company with other people.

It is best known to God what such persons are doing at home, while others are engaged in his publick worship. But 'tis much to be suspected that many of them are not so well employed, and that it is often a meer pretext to cover idleness, indevotion, and a disrelish for serious things, rather than the effect of reason and judgment. And I am sorry to observe that this is not the practice of the profligate part of mankind only, who live without any fear of God, or regard to common decency, but too often of men of rank and profession, men of amiable characters for their sobriety, integrity, and beneficence, and every social virtue, who yet are as rarely seen in the  
house



house of God, as those others *who live without God in the world*. What pity is it that men in other respects so worthy with regard to all men, should be so unworthy towards their God.

This inconsistency in such men, must arise from wrong notions concerning the nature of religion, which they conceive was ordained chiefly for the good and benefit of mankind, that so they might live comfortably and happily together in this world. And if this were truly the case, such men would be really religious men: but there cannot be a greater and more dangerous mistake; and I would to God they would seriously consider the case.

For religion was appointed in the very first place, for the honour and service of God, and to be the great instrument of paying our duty to him as his creatures and subjects. Next to this, it was calculated to make men happy in the life to come, by preparing and fitting them for it. But the lowest end of all was to make them happy in this short and transitory life by the practice of all social virtues, to which purpose these also are made parts of religion by divine appointment. So that the religion of this sort of men is short and defective, and passing by the noblest ends of it, consists only in those duties of the second table that are the lowest and meanest; it is but half religion, and the worst half by many degrees.

The truth of what I have advanced is most apparent from the holy Scriptures. The wise man expressly says, that *God hath made all things*

*things for himself.* That is, for his own honour and glory in the first place; and if that was the first end of our very beings, it must be so of all our operations. And this is made clearer by that precept of St. Paul to the Corinthians, 1 Ep. vi. ch. 20. v. *Glorify God in your bodies, and in your spirit,* and the reason is added, *viz. Because they are God's;* it is therefore a duty founded in his absolute property: and in the 10th ch. 31st v. he declares, *that whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they should do all to the glory of God.* This is also evident from St. Paul's own practice, who exercised himself herein to have always a conscience void of offence towards God in the first place, and then towards men; first in religious, and next in social duties. And in my text he plainly contradistinguishes *living godly,* to the inferior duties of *living soberly and righteously.*

Religion therefore is evidently ordained for the sake of God in the first place; and they who imagine that it is enough to practise those duties only that relate to men, are grossly deceiving themselves.

Now this principle will immediately lead us to the publick worship of God, because it tends more in the very nature of the thing to promote the honour and glory of God, than private worship can possibly do, being performed with greater solemnity, and in the presence of many witnesses. When the nobles or representatives of the whole nation unite in one body to address their prince, no man can deny that greater honour

honour is done to him, than by the separate compliments of each man paid privately to him in his closet. And when a whole congregation unite with one heart and voice, to confess their sins in presence of each other, and humbly to beg God's pardon upon their knees, and praise his adorable excellencies, and by so doing, reciprocally raise and enflame their affections and devotions, there is a peculiar force, solemnity, and beauty in such worship, that is not to be found in that which is private and secret. This is worshipping God in *the beauty of holiness, and giving him the glory due unto his name.* This is that *praise that is comely.*

The worship of heaven is doubtless the most perfect pattern of divine worship; and there we find that *ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands fall down together, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.* There is something so great and magnificent in this description, that every man who reads it must be ready to tune his heart and voice to join in the glorious concert.

Now if after all this, any one should demand authorities for publick worship, I shall refer him to the Psalms of David, where they are found in plenty, and to the practice of our blessed Saviour and his apostles, and the Christians of that time, who often assembled to worship God. And when some particular persons absented themselves, perhaps under the  
same



same mistakes or pretexts that I have before mentioned, St. Paul admonishes them *to provoke one another unto good works; not forsaking the assembling of themselves together as the manner of some was.* So early did this evil practice begin among some lukewarm Christians to the great reproach of their profession.

For the religion of the heathens taught them a better behaviour in this respect, it being the particular care of the wisest governments to maintain the practice of publick worship among the people, as the only means of keeping up a spirit of virtue and sobriety. In the twelve tables of the Roman laws which were borrowed from the Greeks, and adopted by the senate, this was one; “*Ad divos adeunto*” “*caste; pietatem adhibento opes amovento:*” i. e. *Let all men resort to the temples of the Gods, let them perform divine worship with modesty and purity, laying aside all rich and wanton attire.* “*Qui fecus faxit, Deus ipse vindex esto:*” i. e. *If any man shall condemn these sacred institutions, may God himself be the avenger.* So apprehensive were these wise legislators, that a general corruption of manners must be the consequence if atheism and a contempt of things sacred should once prevail among the people. Cicero looked upon this as a matter of so much importance, that he imputes the great power and dominion of the Roman empire to no other cause but the wise care of the government in maintaining religion and divine worship. And we find one of their greatest wits repenting that he had been betrayed by the licentious doctrine

of the Epicureans, into a neglect of the publick worship, and resolving upon a reformation.

I must not omit another part of devotion which naturally offers itself under this head, as being in some part publick, in contradistinction to that which is personal and private, and this is family worship. And the very same arguments that establish publick worship in the church, hold proportionably for this, because every family is a little church or congregation of Christians collected under the same roof; and thus St. Paul expressly calls it in his epistle to Philemon, which he addresses to him, *and to the church in his house*, ver. 2.

The priest or minister of this particular church, is the father or ruler of the family, whose right and authority is founded upon the law of nature. Accordingly we find it exercised in the patriarchal times; for Noah upon his going out of the ark, *built an altar and offered burnt offerings upon it* with his children. Abraham was commanded to offer up his son Isaac in sacrifice. And Job offered up a burnt offering for each of his children.

It is by virtue of this trust, that every father or master of a family is responsible to God for the performance of divine worship within his little jurisdiction. Joshua understood it thus, and resolved to discharge his conscience. *Choose you this day*, says he to the people, *whom ye will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.* And God himself vouches for Abraham's faithful performance of this office; *For I know him that he will command his children*  
and

*and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord, i. e. in training them up by his example as well as precept, in the worship of the true God, in opposition to idolatry.*

As priest therefore of the church in his own house, the nature of his office requires every father or ruler of a family to offer up some sacrifice, and to perform some solemn worship with his household ; and this among Christians can be nothing but those spiritual sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving, which are most acceptable to God.

The advantages that will attend the due performance of this duty, are greater than people are generally aware of.

With regard to God, it will be the surest way to procure his favour and protection, and to bring down his blessing upon all their undertakings.

With regard to children and servants, it will naturally beget in them a reverence for God and things sacred ; and season their minds with religion, and lead them into habits of virtue, sobriety and honesty, by the frequent thoughts of God and another world, which would rarely come into their heads but by this means. And as servants are generally ignorant of religion, this will be one way to improve their knowledge ; for prayers composed with judgment will enlighten their minds, as well as assist their devotion.

And with regard to the world, if that motive may be admitted, it will procure credit, esteem, and honour. A family noted for re-



ligion and the fear of God, can never want the confidence and good offices of their neighbours; and even they who do not love religion themselves, will shew esteem and kindness to those that do. For it must charm the most profligate man, to see this devout society assembled every morning and evening upon their knees, to praise God for his benefits, and pray to him even for those who do not pray for themselves.

This constant regard to God in family worship, is one necessary branch of that *godly living* required in the text; and will be found in every family where the master or governor has a true sense of religion upon his heart. Particular emergencies and incidents may sometimes prevent it, but where it is ordinarily neglected, God is neglected; there may be devotion in closets, but that is not visible and exemplary, and cannot pass for the devotion of the society; for the honour of God, and the face of religion are no more seen in that family for six days of the week, than where there is no religion at all.

It is no shame to take good example from any body; and I am sorry that many families of the established church have this lesson to learn from those who dissent from it.

I wish these considerations may have some weight with men of good sense and probity, to rectify their mistaken notions, and to cure them of that irreligious custom of neglecting the publick worship of God, which I would in charity hope may proceed rather from want of due attention to the argument, than from any deliberate and settled principles. And

And in order to enforce the same, I will offer one or two suggestions to their serious thoughts.

The first is the bad effects which their example must have upon other people, who would gladly be excused from the trouble of attendance on divine worship, and yet would be ashamed of appearing less religious than their neighbours, if they had not such precedents to plead for their neglect. Such men therefore of character and credit will do well to consider how much they have to answer for, in misleading the ignorant, who do not enter into their speculations, but are ready enough to copy after them in things agreeable to their humours and inclinations.

The second is, That this practice is some stain and blemish upon their characters, how bright soever they may be in all other respects. For all men who are truly religious look upon God as their best friend, and are therefore jealous for his honour, and cannot thoroughly esteem any contemner of him; and a thousand other good qualities will not make up for this essential defect in their account. And good reason they have for it, since God himself has declared, *Them that honour me, I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

The third consideration I would offer, is, that the neglect of the publick worship of God by such men as I have characterized, must tend to banish religion out of the world; for if their example should have its natural influence, the multitude would drop off man after man, and

every man may be excused upon the same foot that any one man is ; and the consequence would be, that our churches will be shut up, the Lord's day will be struck out of the calendar, and the face of religion will be no more seen in the world. I have the charity to believe that few of these gentlemen would choose to have things come to this pass, but would be glad to keep up the discipline of religion at least, for the good of the populace, and of their families and servants. Generous indeed they are, to deny the best things to themselves, and allow them to their inferiors. But these perhaps will be as modest in their turns, and leave them to their betters ; and thus, by degrees, we shall see nothing but the face of atheism in the world. And how light soever some men may make of the solemn observation of publick worship on the Lord's day, yet the institution of it was wise, and the good effects are justified from experience. The last confessions of those who die by the hands of publick justice bear witness to this : for they frequently deplore their violation of the Lord's day, as one principal occasion of their profligate lives, and untimely ends. I shall leave with all such, that tremendous denunciation of our blessed Saviour, *Woe to him through whom offences come*, i. e. who is the instrument of creating prejudices against religion : *It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea.*

I cannot dismiss this subject without taking notice of one pretence for not going to the publick worship of God, which is frequent  
in



in the mouths of such absentees ; and this is, why should they go to church to hear a dull sermon that can teach them nothing which they did not know before ?

No man can deny, but there are to be found among the clergy, men who as to natural abilities, and acquired knowledge in most sciences, are not inferior to any of the laity, and who having turned their studies in an especial manner to divinity, may be allowed to exceed all other men in that particular science ; and such preachers cannot fail of instructing, and pleasing these knowing and curious hearers.

And if there are others among the clergy of inferior talents, as there are in all professions, yet there is no man that comes with an honest heart, but may reap some benefit by their discourses. That must be a very dull sermon indeed, out of which he can pick nothing good and profitable. One good hint may be well worth his attention, and reward his trouble, and it is hard if the dullest sermon will not afford him this.

And if this knowing hearer should meet with nothing new to him in a sermon, yet it may chance to revive long neglected truths, which had lain by as useless lumber in some dark corner of his brain ; it may present known truths in new and happier lights ; it may enforce them with new motives that may awaken the attention, and excite the affections, and persuade him to the practice of what he knew before only by the way of meer speculation.

St. Peter thought this a very reasonable end to answer ; *Wherefore*, says he, *I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, tho' ye know them* ; when no more than this is done, it will be an hour better spent, than he would have spent elsewhere.

When a man quarrels with a plain discourse, I fear it proceeds from an affectation of novelities, or fine sentiments and turns of wit and imagination, rather than a desire of being reformed and amended ; he has those *itching ears* mentioned by St. Paul, which he chooses rather to have tickled and pleased, than to have his heart touched and persuaded. It is a strong proof of a depraved stomach, when nothing but dainties will go down, and he cannot relish the sincere milk of the word.

After all, this excuse for neglecting the publick worship of God is grounded upon a meer mistake ; for the sermon, be it good or bad, is not properly speaking a part of divine worship, but is only a discourse of the minister, addressed to the people, who are the objects of it. But divine worship is the act of the people, addressed to God, as the only object : and I hope that no man, be he never so knowing and accomplished, is too good for this.

Having thus shewn you what is implied in the great and general precept of *living soberly, righteously, and godly*, which is a short summary of our Christian duty, I shall briefly take notice of the great motive which St. Paul offers to enforce the same in those words following

ing my text, *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

Here we may see plainly, that the design of our Saviour's death was not merely to save us from the punishment of our sins, without repentance and reformation on our parts; for it could not consist with the wisdom and honour of God's government to do this; nor with the holiness of his nature, and the purity of the heavenly felicity to admit impure creatures into that true holy of holies, *Where there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth or worketh abomination.* But his design was to prepare us for the heavenly happiness, by the practice of all those excellent virtues which he has taught us in his gospel, and by his own example, and by which his followers are to become a peculiar people, distinguished from the professors of all other religions in the world. Christians so qualified by sanctity of life, and purity of heart, Christians who, agreeably to their holy calling, *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, may justly look for that blessed hope, and glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* And a blessed hope indeed it is, as the object of it is the highest happiness our nature is capable of enjoying, and that exceeds our present imaginations to conceive,  
*such*



*such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive ; and a blessed hope it is in regard to the certainty of attaining it, because it is founded on the promise of God who cannot lie ; for which reason St. Paul says of it, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.*

Now let our modern unbelievers raise a hope like this out of their scheme of natural religion : let them rummage all [the volumes of the philosophers, and torture their own reason, to produce motives to virtue and a good life that can come up to this. We could fly to the goodness of the Deity as well as they, and we can see the excellency and beauty of virtue as well as they, but all this is insufficient to answer the ends proposed.

As to the former ; if God were all goodness, we allow there would be a sure foundation for hope to every man upon their principles.

But this is not the case ; for they must allow that God is a wise and righteous, as well as a good governor of the world, and consequently must be concerned to vindicate the honour of his laws, by punishing disobedient and obstinate transgressors. A governor made up of meer goodness and mercy, could be no governor at all ; for it is absurd to call that a government, where every subject may do what he pleases with impunity. The laws of such a government would cease to be laws, and become meer rules and directions for living, which every one might observe or not, just  
according

according to his inclination. To say that it became the wisdom of God to threaten offenders, but that his goodness will interpose in the end, and hinder the punishment, is to say that God is not wise, for if he were, he would certainly have taken care not to let these men into the secret. The greatest comfort therefore that a repenting heathen, or a modern infidel can have, being drawn from the meer goodness of God, he is dealing deceitfully with himself if he does not put wisdom and justice into the other scale, which will give as much cause for fear. And surely that must be a comfortless situation, that hangs betwixt hope and fear of what shall be a man's portion hereafter.

The latter argument for virtue, drawn from the beauty and excellency of it, which makes it a reward to itself, was indeed finely displayed and painted by the heathen philosophers, who, for want of a better, made the most of this. And upon tempers virtuously inclined it had some effect, because to such, virtue is more easy. But wicked men always treated this as meer declaiming ; and the experience of all ages has shewn that this argument was weak and ineffectual to stop the career of vicious appetites and propensities.

But the Christian is a much happier man, for his hope is built upon a surer foundation than the meer goodness of the Supreme Being. He rests his hope upon *the exceeding great and precious promises of God*, which give him the  
utmost

utmost security of his future reward. And as this is the only secure ground of hope and comfort, so it is the noblest motive to a good life. For *every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.* And there cannot possibly be a stronger encouragement to him to *be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord,* than this assurance, *that his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

Let any man produce me such motives to a virtuous life, and such grounds of hope and comfort out of Socrates, and Plato, and Seneca, and I will give up the Christian religion, for philosophy and the religion of nature.

Allowing then that it will cost us some trouble and pains to govern our passions, and sensual appetites, and live soberly, temperately, and chastely; and that by rendring to all their dues, by paying our just debts, and doing acts of charity, we should reduce those funds that support luxury, and equipage, and the pride of life, nay that by being strictly honest and just we should leave ourselves a bare support, or hardly that; which is to practise righteousness; and that we should conquer our idleness and averfeness to devotion, and oblige ourselves to be constant both in our private and publick worship of God, without which we cannot live godly; I say, allowing that all this will cost us much pains and trouble, yet shall we not be great gainers in the end, and will not the blessed hope that is here set before us, abundantly



dantly make us amends for all this? Men will rise early and sit up late, and deny their sleep, their food and their recreations, in pursuit of their worldly advantages, and think themselves well paid if they happen to succeed. And if they will take no pains to please and serve God, and to deny their lusts and to live up to the rules of the Gospel, and the holy religion they profess, if they will cast away this blessed hope, there is no help for it; their ruin, their eternal ruin, is their own choice, and they run into it with their eyes open.

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## S E R M O N XXV.

The Doctrine of the New Testament  
concerning the Lord's Supper.

By the Rev. Mr. KIPPIS.

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I COR. xi. 29.

*For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily,  
eateth and drinketh damnation to himself,  
not discerning the Lord's body.*

**T**HERE are scarce any parts of Scripture which have been more misunderstood by the genuine disciples of the blessed Jesus, than what the great apostle of the Gentiles hath wrote to the Corinthians, concerning the nature of the Lord's supper, and the qualifications for partaking of it. And yet this cannot have arisen from any difficulty in the place, when compared with the connection, or the design of the author, but is entirely owing to the unhappy interpretations, and the corrupt glosses and additions of mistaken or crafty men. For several persons have deduced such strange consequences

sequences from St. Paul's doctrine, and have insisted upon such a variety of circumstances as necessary to communion, that hence have proceeded the error and the infelicity of vast numbers. But a juster sense of things hath begun to prevail. A delightful and resplendent light hath appeared, where formerly there was nothing but darkness, or at best, gloomy clouds. And this light is at once so agreeable and so useful, that it ought to be communicated as extensively as possible, for the information, the satisfaction, and the benefit of all who are disposed to receive it.

With a view to promote so valuable an end, I have pitched on the words of the text; in treating upon which, I shall

I. Consider wherein the eating and drinking unworthily, and the damnation consequent upon it, mentioned by the apostle, consisted.

II. Explain the nature and design of the Lord's supper, in order to shew what is necessary to a worthy participation of it.

III. Represent the obligations we are under to partake of this ordinance. And,

IV. Conclude with some inferences.

I. I shall consider wherein the eating and drinking unworthily, and the damnation consequent upon it, mentioned by the apostle, consisted. And it deserveth to be remarked, that St. Paul is not here directing himself to Christians in general, but to the Corinthians in particular. What he hath written was not originally composed with a reference to the state of believers, in all ages, places, and circumstances;



cumstances ; but arose from some peculiar errors of the persons whom he addressed. It is certain that if the first converts had not fallen into mistakes and evil practices with respect to the Lord's supper, the passage would never have been found in the epistle. It must indeed be acknowledged, that it is at this day extremely useful to form and rectify our notions ; but nevertheless, as it hath an immediate view to the conduct of the Corinthian disciples, we must enquire what that conduct was, in order to discover its real meaning.

If we look back in the chapter, we shall find the apostle severely reproofing the Corinthians, because when they met together at the sacred table, they acted in a manner directly contrary to the nature and design of the ordinance. One instance in which they did so, is recorded in the eighteenth verse. *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you ; and I partly believe it.* It is well known that one intention of the Lord's supper is to testify the relation which the followers of Jesus stand in to each other, as members of that society of which he is the common lawgiver and sovereign ; and to shew their obligations to cultivate a mutual affection. But the Corinthians were, it seems, split into parties and factions, at the very time when they met to celebrate this holy and social institution. The other particulars in which they had behaved amiss, may be drawn from the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second verses. *When ye come together therefore into one place,*

*place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other, his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.* It is visible in these words, that there are two things which St. Paul setteth himself to correct; an error and a crime. The error against which he remonstrates in the persons to whom he writeth, was their partaking of the Lord's Supper, as if it had been a common banquet. It was usual amongst the Greeks to have entertainments at the house of some friend, where every one brought his own provision, which he might eat at pleasure. At these entertainments, as might naturally be expected, the provision was very different, both in quantity and quality, according to the different inclinations and abilities of the guests. Such a kind of collation the Corinthians supposed the sacrament to be; but from what foundation they had taken up so strange an opinion, we are not able to say. This however, they seem to have done; and the apostle condemneth the notion with great strength and great reason. For the least attention to the nature of the ordinance, will convince us that it is purely a religious act; and consequently, that it ought not to be confounded with any of the ordinary occupations of life.

The error of the Corinthians was succeeded by very criminal behaviour. As they did not

sufficiently distinguish between their customary banquets and this sacred festival, they observed it in a confused, disorderly, and intemperate manner. They carried the provision for their entertainments into the places where they assembled for Christian worship. The rich had a needless superfluity, which, however, they did not offer to their poor brethren, who were destitute. The rich man was drunken, that is, he abused his abundance to a riotous excess; for we cannot suppose that he was actually intoxicated. On the contrary, the poor man was hungry, and in all probability murmured. And in this impious, this shameful situation, they pretended to celebrate that solemn, that divine institution of our great master, by which he designed to excite our gratitude and obedience to himself, and to animate our love for each other. When we read these things, can we avoid being astonished that original converts, that persons who had been instructed by the most illustrious of all the apostles, and who had extraordinary powers and gifts among themselves, should be guilty of such a disgraceful ignorance, and such a scandalous behaviour? How contrary was their deportment in every respect to the purpose of the Redeemer! It was his intention that by the social act of eating and drinking together, as brethren and fellow-disciples, we should open the heart to the most generous and tender sentiments, and lay ourselves out in offices of reciprocal kindness. And yet the Corinthians gave way to schisms, strife, and debate. It is plain that so holy an  
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institution as that of the Lord's Supper, should be separated from the ordinary business and amusements of life, performed at a select time and place, and with a decent solemnity. And yet the Corinthians united it with their customary collations. It is evident that on such an occasion our minds should be composed, our thoughts serious, our affections raised to the warmest fervours of a rational and exalted devotion. And yet the Corinthians came only to the table of gluttony, and the cup of intemperance: they loaded their bodies, and disordered their souls with excess.

Such was the conduct reprov'd by the apostle; after which he proceedeth from the twenty-third verse of the chapter, to give an account of the original appointment of the Lord's Supper, as he had it by immediate revelation from Christ himself: an account directly conformable to what is recorded of the matter, in the writings of the Evangelists. St. Paul then goes on from this foundation in the twenty-seventh verse, to shew that those were guilty of a great crime, who joined in communion unworthily; that is, without duly considering the nature of the ordinance in which they engaged. He advises them therefore in the twenty-eighth verse, to examine themselves by a diligent enquiry into the purposes of the institution; that by such an examination they might be led to partake of it, in a manner agreeable to the intention of the blessed Jesus. To this succeedeth the text; *for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to*

*himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* That is, he that eateth and drinketh without properly reflecting on the design of the ordinance, without distinguishing it from a common banquet, and even converteth it to the ends of intemperance and faction, exposeth himself to the divine judgments. Thus we see, that the eating and drinking unworthily, mentioned by the apostle, hath an immediate reference to the irregularities of which the Corinthians had been guilty.

The damnation spoken of, as the consequence of this unworthy participation of the sacrament, hath been as much misunderstood as the other part of the text; and the mistake hath occasioned prodigious uneasiness to humble and sincere persons, and great harm to the Christian world. The original word might with equal propriety have been translated judgment: and so the verb, from which it is derived, is a little after, actually translated. It is very well known by those who are acquainted with Scripture-language, that it doth not always signify the final condemnation of the life to come; but that it is frequently applied to the temporal instances of our Maker's displeasure. That this was the case in the text, we learn in the following verse. *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* From this passage so expressly connected with the preceding one, it is undeniably apparent, that the damnation treated of is not the future punishment of an eternal state, but the present chastisements of the Deity.

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The Almighty had been pleased to visit some of the offenders with a decay of their health, others with violent disorders, and others with death itself. Even with regard to these last, however they might have failed in the performance of a positive duty, it is reasonable to believe they would be accepted by God, provided they had not wilfully transgressed against inward conviction, and were, upon the whole, real Christians. As to the rest, the judgment they are said to have brought upon themselves, was so far from being an everlasting one, that we are expressly told it was a merciful correction inflicted upon them, on purpose to prevent their final ruin. Verse 32. *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* Such visitations as the Corinthians received, might at that time be extremely proper, to keep up a reverential regard to an ordinance which was then newly appointed ; and the usefulness of which might have been totally frustrated at the beginning, if the profanation of it had not been immediately checked by some extraordinary method.

From all that hath been said, it is, I hope, quite evident, what little reason is afforded by the text, for sincere Christians to fill their hearts with anxiety. It is indeed possible for persons to eat and drink unworthily, who are not guilty of the particular actions which the apostle condemneth. But then they must be guilty of the evil dispositions from which those actions proceeded. Wherever St. Paul's argument



by parity of reasoning will reach, so far it may be lawfully extended. If any man at the time of his eating the bread, and drinking the wine, hath no regard to the duty in which he seemeth to engage ; if he doth not religiously commemorate the death of his divine Master ; if he retaineth no sense of the obedience to which the Saviour is entitled ; if he feeleth no affection for his Christian brethren : if on the contrary, his thoughts and behaviour are directly inconsistent with the nature of the institution, and the temper he is obliged to cultivate in his approach to it ; he then certainly partaketh of the ordinance in an unworthy manner, though he may not have offended in those particular instances of indecency with which the Corinthians were chargeable. Yet even in this case it ought to be observed, that if a person hath acted ill at one opportunity, it doth not follow that he should abstain from the next. He should seek to the mercy of God for pardon, and to his grace for assistance ; and endeavour on future occasions to be found in a more holy and heavenly frame. Thus the guilty Corinthians were not forbidden to come again to the sacred table, but were exhorted to do it hereafter, with greater regularity, decorum and piety. I now proceed,

II. To explain the nature and design of the Lord's supper, in order to shew what is necessary to a worthy participation of it. It is only by considering the genuine intention of the Redeemer, in his appointment of it, that we can be able to ascertain the qualifications which

which are requisite to our joining in the ordinance. This is the method which was taken by St. Paul, in the chapter where the text lies. After he hath given a full account of the manner in which it was instituted by the blessed Jesus, he then directeth the Corinthians from that account to examine their views and their dispositions in order to judge whether they had a right to communion. We must therefore have recourse to the declarations of the Son of God himself, as recorded by his disciples, if we desire to obtain proper notions concerning this matter.

Now from the relations of the Evangelists and St. Paul, we are authorised to assert in the first place, that the grand leading purpose of the Lord's Supper, is to keep up a religious memorial of the death of Christ. This is evident from the words of the institution. Our divine Master, when he had taken the bread, had given thanks, and had broke it, distributed it to the apostles, and said, *This is my body, which is broken for you.* So likewise, when he took the cup, *This cup is the new covenant in my blood.* To which if we add the observation of St. Paul, that *as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we do shew the Lord's death till he come*, it will be apparent that the principal view of the Saviour in this ordinance, is to maintain in all ages of the church, even until his final manifestation at the last day, a standing commemoration of his obedience to the will of God, and his affection to sinners, in dying upon the cross. By the breaking of

bread, the wounds and agonies which the body of Jesus underwent, are represented; and in the pouring out of the wine, we have a lively emblem of that blood by which the new covenant of pardon was ratified; that blood which was shed for many, for the remission of sins. In short, it is intended by these transactions, that we should publickly acknowledge and call to mind this grand fact, that the Messiah suffered unto death. Nor are we to do it in a formal and careless manner; but with souls deeply affected at the contemplation of a scene of such mighty importance.

In consequence of this, secondly, it must be the design of the Lord's Supper, that we exhibit a general testimony of our faith in Christ, our acceptance of his religion, and our subjection to his laws. This is a point incontestably plain from the original notion of the sacrament, as a religious remembrance of our great Master; a notion which evidently implieth in it, that at the same time we profess our belief in his sacred authority, our submission to the method of acquiring the divine favour by him appointed, and our regard to the obligation of his precepts. It is likewise upon this supposition that the apostle argues, when he sheweth that Christians ought not to join with heathens, by feasting in their temples, upon what had been offered to their false gods. *1 Cor. x. 21. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.* The intention of St Paul is here undoubtedly



doubtedly to prove, that as their uniting at the table of the Lord, was a solemn declaration of their being his disciples, it was therefore wholly inconsistent with any degree of even seeming veneration for the pagan worship; and should prevent them from eating openly of the sacrifices that had been dedicated to demons. Indeed when our Saviour ordered the wine to be drank as a representation of the covenant confirmed by his blood, it must certainly have been his purpose that by this rite we should be led to consider the nature of that covenant, and assent to its demands.

The third and last view of the Lord's Supper is to testify the connection we have with each other, as disciples of the same Jesus, and obliged upon that account to maintain a mutual affection. It is true that this idea is not expressly mentioned in the original institution. But that it is included in it, is apparent from the fundamental design of the ordinance. For as it is intended to be a public testimony of the relation we stand in to Christ as our common master, it must necessarily signify that we are members of that one body of which he is the head. Eating and drinking together is as much a social act as any thing can possibly be; and eating and drinking together in a religious manner, was among the ancient nations in general, regarded as a token of reciprocal friendship. But the matter is put out of doubt by the apostle St. Paul, 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion, or joint-partaking, of the blood of Christ?*

*Christ? The bread which we brake, is it not the communion, or joint-partaking, of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.* From these words it is abundantly plain, that as in the joint-partaking of the bread and wine, in commemoration of the Redeemer's death, we declare our fellowship with him; so likewise we profess our communion with each other. We acknowledge ourselves, as Christians, to be nearly and intimately related; to constitute one entire society, distinct from the rest of the world; and obliged, by virtue of this union, to be kind, tender, and placable; even as God in Christ hath forgiven us.

Having thus considered the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, nothing is more easy than from hence to shew what is necessary, in order to communicate in a worthy manner. If a person desireth to remember the death of Jesus with gratitude and affection; if he is willing to proclaim his belief in him, and his acceptance of him, as a Master whose laws he will study to obey, and a Saviour whose terms he will endeavour to comply with; if he is solicitous to testify his love towards those who are united with him in the same bonds of religion; he hath then not only a right, but it is his duty to approach the sacred table. But if any man hath such a disregard to the Son of God, that he doth not care to commemorate his dying compassion to the world; if he rejecteth his divine authority, refuseth to own him as his law-giver, and despiseth the blessings that are by him

him dispensed from the great parent of mercies ; if he doth not choose to acknowledge the votaries of the Redeemer as his fellow disciples and brethren, he ought to abstain from communion. In such a case, his heart is absolutely unfit for it, and he should have no part or lot in this matter. The questions therefore which a person who seeketh to know the state of his soul, should put to himself, are such as these. Am I so sensible of the amazing things which Jesus Christ, in obedience to the will of the Father, hath performed for mankind ; and particularly, of the grand instance of affection he exhibited on the cross, as to desire that I may ever maintain a flow of the most pious and thankful passions on this account ? Do I so firmly believe in him as the prophet and head of the church, that I would willingly be saved by him in the method of repentance and universal holiness which he hath commanded ? Have I such a value for the covenant established by my Saviour's blood, that I am resolved to accept it with gratitude, and to adhere to it with my whole soul ? Have I such a regard to all Christians, that I wish to behave towards them with that candor, harmony, and kindness, which the connection we bear, as followers of the same master, requireth at my hands ? Whoever can answer to these questions with a genuine approbation of his inward dispositions ; whoever can appeal to the Almighty in the sincerity of his heart, and say that he is ready to testify his grateful acknowledgment and remembrance of the Redeemer's death ; that he is desirous to assent to  
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his demands, to obey his precepts, and to embrace with the open arms of good will and tenderness the human race in general, and especially every real servant of Christ; that is the man who is qualified to participate of the sacrament, and who should hasten to comply with the institution of the Son of God.

To this he is strongly and undeniably urged in the New Testament; as will appear while I represent,

III. The obligations we are under to partake of the Lord's supper. It is allowed by all who understand the nature of true religion, that when moral and positive duties interfere, the preference must be given to the former. The reason is, that moral precepts are eternally and unalterably binding; are in themselves beautiful, excellent, and useful; and are the grand ends in subserviency to which rituals are appointed. Whereas the positive ones are only beneficial at particular times, and in particular circumstances; and derive their principal value from their tendency to promote other things, of inward and essential importance. *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*, is the declaration of sacred writ; a declaration agreeable to all the dictates of natural light, and confirmed by all the tenor of revelation. It is the determinate doctrine of both the Old and the New Testament, that *to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God*, is vastly superior in worth to the strictest observance of external institutions, even when prescribed by the Supreme Being himself. But though these truths should  
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ever rest upon our minds, as what are of the highest necessity to regulate our conduct; yet no argument can hence be formed, to justify a neglect of positive appointments. Because when weightier matters do not intervene, we are obliged to comply with them, if plainly commanded by a divine legislator.

With regard to the Christian religion, we are convinced by a variety of evidence, that the Lord Jesus was a mighty personage sent from God, to teach men the way of knowledge, holiness, and happiness. We are convinced that the Father hath made him the prophet, the lawgiver, and the sovereign of the church; and that whatever precepts he hath delivered, it is our indispensable duty to obey them. Now although the general series of our Saviour's commands, hath an immediate reference to those virtues of piety, benevolence, integrity, and self-government, which are dictated by the light of nature, and which the relations we stand in to the Deity, to ourselves, and our fellow-creatures, at all times require at our hands; yet we find in the gospel some few external rites. We are, in particular, directed to meet together at certain seasons, in the places appropriated to divine worship, and there publicly to eat bread and drink wine, as tokens that we religiously remember our dying Redeemer; that we receive his laws, accept his covenant, and venerate his authority; and that we possess a sincere affection for each other. This we are ordered to do, in four different places of holy writ. The precept was given  
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by our Lord himself ; it was uttered with the greatest solemnity ; and it was attended with actions, as well as words. For the blessed Jesus did not only instruct his disciples to observe the institution hereafter ; but made them instantly perform it. The expressions he used are as plain as can be devised. He was now at the approach of death ; a circumstance which rendereth the injunctions of friends peculiarly forcible ; and we are assured that this rite is to be observed in all the succeeding ages of the world, even until his second coming, at the final consummation of things. That the sacrament is an ordinance of considerable importance, and intended for a perpetual memorial, is further apparent from our Saviour's delivering the account of it to St. Paul, by immediate revelation. We find likewise that at the first propagation of the gospel, all professing Christians partook of it. The distinction between hearers and communicants had not then taken place ; and therefore it seemeth to have stood on the same foundation with our obligation to attend publick worship in general.

All these circumstances being compared together, I would ask in what possible manner we can pretend to evade so evident a command ? Shall we say that we are not obliged to obey it, though it is absolutely enjoined by the Son of God ? This we cannot do, without renouncing his authority. If then we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus, what justifiable reason can we assign for the wilful neglect of any precept, that is insisted upon by our divine Master ?



It deserveth also to be considered how much satisfaction we may lose by trifling in this matter. It must undoubtedly afford some uneasiness to a sincere servant of the Redeemer, when he reflecteth that he is pursuing a course which his own mind telleth him to be contrary to his character and obligations, as a follower of Christ. Not to mention, that by such a behaviour, we are deprived of the consolation which ariseth from joining in an ordinance so delightful as that of the Lord's Supper ; a consolation which springeth in general, from the sense of having discharged our duty ; and in particular, from the pleasing views of our honour and happiness as Christians, which at that time engage our contemplations. May it not likewise justly be expected, that a person who continued in the neglect of a command which he believed to be prescribed by his Saviour, will want that full tranquillity and joy at the hour of death, which he might otherwise have experienced ?

Should, after all, any be inclined to think that the sacrament is a mere ceremony, a trifle not important enough to require much of our attention ; we may observe that nothing can be a trifle which is ordered by God, and that it is calculated to produce excellent purposes in the heart, even the purposes of inward piety, and substantial goodness.

Several other thoughts might here be added ; but what hath been already said may suffice to shew that if we believe the divine mission of Jesus, we are bound in this, as well as other instances,

instances, to obey his precepts. I must however beg leave to be here understood as making a great difference between those who abstain from communion, in consequence of a wilful disregard to it, and those humble upright minds who are held back by nothing but their unhappy fears and scruples. The last persons are indeed objects of tenderness and compassion; and I would earnestly recommend to them the careful consideration of what hath been suggested under the first head. It now remaineth.

IV. That we conclude with some inferences. And,

I. We may see the wisdom and goodness of the Son of God, in his appointment of the Lord's Supper. I am not insensible that much difficulty hath been raised upon this head; and that persons disaffected to Christianity, have endeavoured to expose the gospel on account of its positive institutions; as if its design was to make religion consist in outward observances and useless ceremonies. But nothing can be more unjust than the least insinuation of this kind. Some degree of external form is necessary to keep up the appearance of piety in the world; and it is the excellence of the New Testament that it requireth no more of it than is highly important to the best inward purposes; no more of it than is proper to restrain the superstitious fancies, and prevent the foolish inventions of men. We find by experience that it hath been the practice of mankind in all ages, to multiply the rites of worship in a needless and ridiculous manner. Now had there not been any outward appointments in the revelation of the  
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bleſſed Jeſus, the profeſſors of it, having no direction from their great maſter, might have thought themſelves at liberty to follow their own imaginations without controul. But a ſtrict adherence to the ordinances of Chriſt, and to them only, would put a ſtop to ſuch a conduct, and become the beſt foundation of a rational homage to the Deity. Indeed the whole hiſtory of the church will inform us, that where a careful attention to the rules of the goſpel hath been maintained, there the publick ſervice of God hath been plain, ſolid and edifying: while, on the other hand, a departure from the ſimplicity practiſed and directed by our Saviour and his apoſtles, hath produced an exuberance of folly and ſuperſtition that is quite aſtoniſhing, and hath brought infinite ſcandal on the Chriſtian name.

As the wiſdom and benevolence of the Redeemer is thus apparent, in admitting ſome few external inſtitutions into his ſyſtem of religion; ſo with reſpect to the Lord's Supper in particular, what appointment could we think upon, that is leſs liable to objection? It is plain to be underſtood; it is eaſy to be obſerved; and every end it is intended to answer, is deſirable and important.

The manifeſtation of the Son of God is the moſt illuſtrious and momentous event that can poſſibly engage our meditations. To his life and death, his reſurrection and glorification, we are indebted for our hopes and aſſurances of pardon, peace, and happineſs. For our benefit he made the moſt amazing ſtoop from the



dignity he enjoyed with the Father, poured divine instructions from his lips, and shone forth with an all-perfect, all-lovely example. For our benefit he submitted to a course of the most evil treatment from his bitter enemies, to the agonies of the cross, and to become the subject of death. For our benefit he rose again with power and lustre, ascended into the mansions of eternal bliss, manageth our affairs with God, and holdeth, by commission from him, the reins of government. And shall the amiable, the excellent, the beneficial deeds of this Saviour, be buried in oblivion? Forbid it gratitude, duty, interest! forbid it every consideration that can work upon the mind! With great wisdom and goodness therefore did Jesus institute a rite which should call his love to our memories, and awake each pious passion in our breasts. A rite, which by the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of wine, should especially represent to us that most signal proof of his and his heavenly Father's affection, when his tender frame was exposed to wounds and bruises, and streams of precious blood issued from his sacred veins.

The more we consider the matter, the more we shall perceive that there was a peculiar propriety in pointing out, by a particular ordinance, a fact of such immense importance in the scheme of revelation. Nay, we might venture, perhaps, to assert, that in some dark and corrupted ages, when the Scriptures were held from the common people, and very little studied by the priests, the death of Christ would have been

been almost forgot, had not the remembrance of it been constantly kept up, by the celebration of the sacrament.

Again ; the vanities of the world, the allurements of sensual pleasure, the charms of ambition, the splendour of riches ; in short, temptations from present objects of every kind, have often too fatal an influence on our temper and conduct. They have a melancholy aptitude to draw the soul aside to folly, and to obliterate the impressions of divine things. It was therefore a wise and kind intention of the Redeemer by a frequent repetition of the Lord's Supper, to call back the wandering heart of man to a sense of his duty and obligations as a Christian.

Once more : though the religion of Jesus is altogether gentle, generous, and beneficent ; though its whole tendency is to correct the humours, sweeten the disposition, and enlarge the affections of men ; and though it enforceth all this upon us by motives surprisngly powerful and affecting, yet such is the perverseness of the human mind, that jealousies and contentions, envy, wrath, and malice, too often find admittance there. Was it not then an instance of our Saviour's wisdom and benevolence, by uniting us together at the sacrament, to urge the putting away of bitterness, and anger, evil speaking and revenge ; and to inspire us with condescension, compassion, and love ?

2. From the account that hath been given of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, we may perceive the folly and iniquity of those

unscriptural terms of communion, upon which great numbers have insisted. It is well known that subscription to a set of articles; an assent to some particular doctrines either not found at all in the Gospel, or at least, not mentioned as essential; and a compliance with certain ceremonies and gestures, have in one church and another, been required of their members. By such impositions the peace of the christian world hath been prodigiously disturbed, and endless disorders and calamities have prevailed in the earth. Nay, in consequence of such impositions, rivers of blood have been shed among professors of the same religion. And the continuance of these impositions is still a grand cause of the divisions, strife and uncharitableness, that subsist amidst those who are called after the name of the merciful Jesus. But what can be more impious than for persons to prescribe laws and tests, which Christ himself hath not prescribed? Is not this to set ourselves up in his stead, and to wrest the dominion out of his hands? The sacrament, as it was by him appointed, was intended to be a uniting ordinance; and none ought on any pretence to be excluded from it, who profess, and appear, to be his sincere followers. We should therefore be studious to keep exactly to his institution, without mixing our own fancies, or bigotry, or temporal policy, with what the Saviour alone had a right to direct.

3. From what hath been said we may correct the superstitious and dangerous notions which many entertain concerning the Lord's Supper.



Supper. The papists suppose that the body and blood of Christ is actually present under the forms both of the bread and the wine ; and that he is swallowed whole by every communicant. Not to insist upon the infinite absurdities and absolute contradictions with which this opinion is clogged ; absurdities and contradictions that no words can exaggerate, and which must fill a thinking mind with the highest astonishment, and the warmest indignation ; the opinion itself, without regard to the impossibility of its being true, is contrary to the very nature of the ordinance. For as it is designed to be the memorial of a past fact, and must be performed in remembrance of Jesus as a person corporally absent, how can he be actually present ? A careful examination will, I am persuaded, convince us, that the expression, *this is my body*, doth not immediately and exclusively relate to the bread only, but to the whole action of eating ; and in that case, there is not the least ground for the doctrine of transubstantiation, even taking the words in their most literal sense.

The protestant world hath also been prodigiously infected with errors upon the same subject, though not of the same kind with that just mentioned. Some are ready to think that they have communicated in an unworthy manner, because their passions have not been violently moved. Others carry their ideas of the sacrament too high, by placing it at a vast distance from the common duties of religious worship ; and by preferring it even to prayer, which is certainly the most solemn act of de-

votion, in which a creature can engage. Others imagine that it sealeth to them the pardon of their sins. Nay, great numbers look upon it as a sort of charm, that will give them a passport to heaven, whatever their inward dispositions may have been. This is a supposition extremely fatal in its tendency, and is too much encouraged by the manner in which the communion is frequently administered to dying persons, and especially condemned malefactors; which leadeth both them and others into such false hopes that are destructive to their souls. Such sentiments, and the practices which favour them, are in reality a scandal to the Christian name. The only use of the Lord's Supper is to impress those affecting views of the death of Christ, and that deep sense of our obligations as his disciples, which shall be calculated to render us truly and eternally holy, just, and good; and should this end not be answered in our minds, it is at best an idle, and if trusted in, a dangerous ceremony.

4. and lastly; We should each of us be solicitous to attend upon the sacrament, with proper qualifications, views, and dispositions. If it be asked what kind of preparation is peculiarly necessary, in order to our approaching the sacred table; it may be answered, that the real followers of the Saviour should always be in a prepared state. There is nothing in the nature of the ordinance which forbiddeth our partaking of it on the most sudden warning; provided we understand it in any tolerable degree, and are inclined to communicate in a serious

rious manner. Since however, particular seasons are generally set apart for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which we are previously acquainted with; it must certainly be very useful to collect our thoughts before-hand, and to furnish our minds with suitable reflections. We should therefore employ our meditations on the design and excellency of the gospel; on the noble system of doctrines and duties it containeth; on the illustrious, divine and complete example of the blessed Jesus; on the important privileges, the valuable promises, and the ravishing prospects his revelation affords; and on the bright and convincing evidence with which it is attended. We should contemplate on that essential and unparalleled benevolence of the Deity, from which the whole scheme of our redemption was derived; on the readiness that was manifested by the Son of God in undertaking our cause; and on his wonderful transactions, in the prosecution of his great work. Above all, we should impress upon our souls a strong sense of the special and immediate purposes for which the sacrament was appointed.

When we actually join in communion, we should be concerned that our affections are properly directed, and warmly engaged. To have our hearts fixed upon the vanities, or profits, or cares of the world, while we are present at the sacred table, is certainly a direct violation of the ordinance: and therefore we should be extremely desirous to maintain a right temper and behaviour at that time. We



should study to abstract our thoughts as much as possible, from every foreign, every terrestrial consideration: and to have our pious passions fervently employed in the solemn service: ‘ Retire, O my soul,’ we may each of us say, ‘ from this inferior scene of things; from all its pleasures, and all its pursuits; and hold communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Meditate upon that infinite grace of God which contrived the amazing plan that displayeth pardon, peace, and endless happiness, to so undeserving a creature as thou art. Recollect that surprising condescension and tenderness of the Redeemer, which induced him to bring down salvation from heaven to earth. Call to mind the admirable instructions he offered, the charming pattern he exhibited, the hard labours and sufferings he endured, in the course of his ministry. Especially call to mind the ignominy, the reproaches, the agonies he went through, when he hung upon the cross, and brought in everlasting mercy. Think upon these affecting subjects, till thy heart is filled with sorrow for thine iniquities; till thy faith becometh lively, active, and fruitful; till thy gratitude and love are elevated to the highest pitch; till thy obedience is rendered uniform, steady and complete. Hast thou, O my God, and parent of universal nature, so illustriously manifested thy compassion to sinners, as not to spare thy own Son? Hast thou sent the Saviour into this lower world, in order to raise the children of men

‘ to

‘ to immortality, perfection, and glory? And  
‘ am I now in thy presence, on purpose to celebrate that institution, which requireth me  
‘ to commemorate the death of the Messiah;  
‘ to declare my publick acceptance of his excellent revelation, and my regard to my Christian brethren? May then the remembrance of  
‘ his beneficence dwell upon my mind and my tongue, for ever and ever! May I consider,  
‘ and comply with the intention of his gospel!  
‘ And may the sentiments of kindness and charity towards all my fellow men and fellow  
‘ disciples, reign in my breast, with increasing purity, and increasing zeal!’

Such are the views which should possess our souls, when we partake of the Lord's Supper. But it will signify little, to entertain these views at that time, unless the effects of them are apparent in our future conversation. A transient flow of affections, or sallies of immediate delight, were not principally intended in the ordinance. The blessed Jesus did not ordain it as a ceremony or a charm; but as a proper method of establishing our hearts in pious and virtuous dispositions. Though you have therefore, O! Christians, obeyed the Redeemer's command, in this appointment, and have found your passions greatly moved; yet that is not the whole that is required at your hands. For hence it may justly be expected that you should live to the honour of your divine Master. As you have solemnly professed your faith in him, and your love towards him, the reality of your faith and love should be evidenced by  
walking

walking more strictly in the way of his precepts; and by abounding in that heavenly character and temper, which his spotless example so engagingly recommendeth. Thus only, will the sacrament become subservient to the most beneficial purposes. Thus only, will it be instrumental in qualifying us for sharing in the dignity and felicity possessed by our exalted Saviour. And God grant that all the followers of his Son, may by uniting together at the communion, advance from holiness to holiness, till they shall arrive at the regions of everlasting bliss. *Amen.*

SERMON



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# S E R M O N XXVI.

Rules for the profitable reading the  
Holy Scriptures.

By the Rev. Dr. FOSTER.

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JOHN v. 39. .

*Search the Scriptures.*——

**A**S mankind are endued with moral powers, and consequently accountable creatures, it necessarily follows, that they had always a law or rule of action sufficient to direct their conduct. The original and universal law was what we call the law, or religion of nature: this their reason was capable of discovering; and it would have taught them, if they had consulted, and carefully attended to it, the being and perfections of God, his providential government of the world, the duties they owed to him and one another, and which related to the right government of their affections and appetites; and, in short, how to behave in the various

rious circumstances and relations of human life. In like manner, it would have furnished proper motives to a regular and virtuous conduct,—from the excellency of virtue in itself;—its necessary tendency to the perfection and happiness of human nature, and the good of society;—and by giving a well grounded hope, in some way or other worthy his infinite wisdom, and concern for the rectitude and order of the moral world, of the special protection and favour of their Creator, and supreme governor.

But notwithstanding this wise provision, by the natural light planted in every man's mind, the world became, in fact, grossly and almost universally depraved; ran into deplorable ignorance of God; into childish and very dishonourable conceptions of his nature and attributes; into idolatry, and an absurd, hurtful, and endless superstition; and their religion corrupted their morals. It was not because their reason was, in itself, insufficient to direct to better sentiments of things, but because it was not improved and cultivated. However, as mankind was really thus corrupted, and had lost, in a great measure, the knowledge of the true religion of nature, the expediency and usefulness of a revelation was not at all the less, merely because reason, if rightly exercised, was capable of discovering all the necessary principles of morality; nay, indeed, the advantage of it is altogether as evident, as it would have been, if men were unavoidably ignorant of the great truths of religion. For how they came to be out of the way is not the question, whether

whether it proceeded from a defect in their natural powers, or from want of attention, and not using these powers as they ought; in both cases, it is certain, they needed to be set right again, and recovered to a just sense of their duty, and happiness: and accordingly God was pleased graciously to interpose, and give a revelation suited to the circumstances and necessities of an ignorant and degenerate world: but tho' this revelation was an unspeakable privilege at first, by putting a stop to superstition and wickedness, and diffusing light and knowledge amongst men; though it may be still of the utmost use, to the bulk of mankind, as a standing rule, by supplying them constantly with proper thoughts, which is what the common people, in all ages, have most wanted, and prescribing a plain, intelligible, and compleat rule of morals; notwithstanding, I say, that a revelation is so desirable a blessing, and may answer such valuable purposes, it is certain that men may pervert it, as well as extinguish their reason; and that if it be neglected and not examined into with care and impartiality, it will be, just as that natural light was, and is at present, in the more ignorant and superstitious parts of the world, dark and useless; of which the monstrous corruptions of Christianity in Popish countries, equal to any corruptions of natural religion, in the most barbarous heathen nations, are a notorious and unanswerable proof.

It is indeed a principle of their faith, that the common people are not to examine into their religion;



religion ; but take it implicitly from the church : and it must be allowed, that this is a necessary principle to establish antichristian tyranny over the consciences of men, and support schemes of doctrine which bid defiance to reason, and are inconsistent with the whole design and tenour of revelation : these things will not bear the light, nor stand a free and impartial trial, and therefore are sheltered under the covert of ignorance and darkness. But can any thing be more absurd than such a conduct as this ? Does it not derogate, in the highest degree, from the excellency and perfection of the Scriptures ? Is it not a very unworthy and injurious reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God ? Nay, does it not entirely destroy all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation ?

It will be needless to enter into a large proof of these things in any nation where light and liberty prevails, and persons have a just notion of their rights, either as men, or as Christians. For if God gives any revelation at all, the common sense of mankind determines that it must, in all essential and important branches of it, be a plain and easy rule ; obvious to the capacities of all for whose benefit it is designed. For what is the end of a revelation ? Is it not to instruct the ignorant, and consequently to lay down plain principles for directing and regulating their behaviour ? Or is it to amuse and confound their minds yet more with deep subtilties, with perplexed and intricate speculations ? A revelation that is not intelligible is as much a contradiction, as to say darkness is light. And there

there is an unanswerable force in the common argument used upon this occasion, *viz.* either that God could not reveal himself clearly in those points which are of the greatest consequence to mankind, or that he would not: the former of these reflects upon his wisdom, the latter on his goodness; so that either way, the supposition is unworthy of God, and dishonourable to his perfections; since it represents him as a very weak, or else as a capricious ill-natured being, who intended not to assist, but bewilder his creatures, and lead them in a maze of uncertainty and confusion.

Again, a revelation that is dangerous to be read, and cannot be trusted to the reason and judgment of mankind, that needs to be illustrated, corrected, or supplied by a living infallible oracle, and judge of controversies, is altogether as insignificant as no revelation at all. If men have a standing rule to have recourse to, it is, at least, possible, that if they seriously consider and search into it, they may frame just notions of things, a rational scheme to act upon: but if they are blindly to follow their spiritual guides, and swallow all their doctrines implicitly, they are liable to endless impostures; and can have no guard against the most stupid enthusiasm, nor even against irreligion itself.

Finally, a revelation designed for general use, which is evidently the case of the Christian, must be chiefly calculated for the bulk of mankind, and adapted to their capacities. The ingenious and thinking part have, in every age, been a very few; and the generality, persons of  
little

little reflection, who must be instructed in the most easy and familiar manner, and taught their duty with the greatest plainness and simplicity. To assert therefore that the Scriptures are obscure, and unintelligible, full of mystery and darkness, renders them quite useless as an universal rule ; and consequently defeats the very end of their being written, which was general instruction : and to deny the reading of them to the common people is to deny it to those, for whose benefit they were more directly and immediately intended. This is the manifest reason of the thing.

Agreeably hereto, we find the Scripture itself is so far from debarring the people of this right, that it insists upon it, and encourages it in the strongest terms. There are no distinctions of persons, some to lead, and others absolutely to submit to their interpretations and decisions ; but the exhortations and instructions are general. They were not the scribes and pharisees, and doctors of the law, but the common sort of Jews, to whom our Saviour said in the text, *Search the Scriptures* ; nay, whom he supposes not only capable of understanding the plain doctrines and laws of the Old Testament, but the more obscure and intricate parts of it, the prophecies relating to the Messiah ; *Search the Scriptures, they are they that testify of me* : and for this the people of Berea are greatly commended, *viz.* for not believing the apostles themselves implicitly, but, *searching the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so*. This practice of theirs is represented as the mark of  
a noble



a noble and ingenuous mind; whereas the contrary springs from abject and slavish prejudice. In like manner St. Paul speaks of Timothy, and describes it as what had been of great advantage to him, *that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures.* And of those same Scriptures he says, that they were *able to make him wise unto salvation*; and again, *all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* Now if it was the duty of all to search into the Jewish Scriptures, and even into dark prophecies, the common people must certainly be proper judges of, and consequently obliged to examine into, the plain facts, doctrines, and moral precepts of Christianity. Nay, it cannot be reconciled to the wisdom of God, to suppose, that the last and most perfect revelation of his will is not also the clearest and fullest; or that the same characters of being *profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness*, which render it fit to be perused and studied by all, do not belong to that in a much higher degree, than they did to a preparatory revelation of inferior consequence, and more limited extent.

And as the right of all the people to search the Scripture is evident, founded in reason, and strongly asserted in revelation itself; so are the advantages of it.—Reading the Scriptures with seriousness and diligence, is the natural way for men to form a consistent and rational scheme of belief and practice, just notions of God, and

of the extent of religious and moral obligations: by this means, they will have a straight, easy rule to go by, and build their hopes of happiness upon a solid foundation: whereas the want of it has introduced incomprehensible and senseless articles of faith, doctrines prejudicial to morality, dark and gloomy notions of God, and superstitious fears destructive of the peace and comfort of men's minds.—Reading the Scriptures with impartiality, will inspire sincere and honest minds with humanity and benevolence, with moderation and forbearance in lesser differences: but the neglect of it occasions hot and angry controversies, blind and violent disputes, and a zeal without knowledge or discretion.—Again, by this means common Christians will better understand the grounds of their faith, and consequently be more firmly established in it: they will be more fully acquainted with the intrinsic excellence of the doctrines of Christianity, and the strength and force of its external evidence; and so be believers, not upon the foot of tradition and authority, which confirms all religions equally, but upon rational conviction and choice: they will also find it much more easy to detect the sophistry and false reasoning of its adversaries; whose practice it is (and in that they must soon be discovered by such as study the Scriptures) to expose and argue against the corruptions and extravagancies of party-schemes as true Christianity.

But the greatest motive of all to a diligent search of the holy Scriptures, is that mentioned in the text, that in them we *believe we have*  
*eternal*

*eternal life*: therein we have an assurance of a happy immortality, as the reward of true piety and virtue, which to reason is very obscure and doubtful at least, if at all probable. Reason may discover something, in general, of a future state of rewards, but gives very little ground to expect that they will be eternal: this is the unspeakable gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. As therefore the Gospel is the only sure foundation we have of this glorious hope, we should read it frequently for the satisfaction and comfort of our minds, and carefully examine upon what terms we may hope to be entitled to it: this is the most important interest of our being, and should therefore be the chief object of our study. An error here may be of fatal consequence, which renders our utmost diligence necessary. And as these sacred writings contain the rule by which we shall be judged, and have our eternal condition determined, need any thing be added to excite us to search into them with the greatest exactness, as for the most excellent and beneficial knowledge; and with the greatest impartiality, that we may not be imposed on in so high and momentous a concern. Indolence or negligence, in this great point, is certainly most unaccountable and unpardonable stupidity. But I must content myself with just mentioning these things, that I may proceed to what I chiefly designed, and judge to be the most useful part of a discourse on this subject, *viz.* to lay down some Rules for the profitable reading the Scriptures. By not observing these Rules men have lost all the advantages of this



study; and besides from hence have risen all those inconveniences, which have been represented as the natural consequence of allowing the use of them to the common people, and urged as arguments against it.

The first thing that I would recommend is, that we come to the search with honest and unprejudiced minds. In order to the finding out truth in the great points that relate to moral practice, an acute understanding is not so necessary as a *sincere upright heart*; and even the plainness of the rule itself does not contribute more towards it, than integrity and impartiality, in those who are to be guided by it. Prejudice will pervert and darken the plainest rule. And therefore if men apply to the study of the Scriptures with minds prepossessed in favour of any particular scheme; if they take it for granted, before they have examined, that this is the religion of the Bible; all they have to do is, in the best manner they can, to accommodate Scripture to it. By their being thus pre-determined, all farther light is precluded; passages of Scripture are strained, and tortured, and darkened by unnatural comments; because men search the Scripture not to find out the sense of that, but to make it speak their own sense. But, on the contrary, if their minds are free and disengaged, and they have no concern but for truth, the rule of Scripture is so plain in all essential points, that they can hardly, with an ordinary degree of judgment, mistake it. In the natural course of things, such an honest ingenuous temper, divested of all prejudice, all  
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attachment to favourite opinions, will lead to the knowledge of every necessary truth, and secure from dangerous and hurtful errors: it is indeed the surest ground-work and foundation of proficiency in divine knowledge; without which, the greatest abilities will serve but to confound and puzzle a man the more, as they furnish a thousand little evasions, and help him to give plausible colours to falsehood, and consequently will carry him so much the farther from the end proposed.

2dly, In all our searches into Scripture, let us keep this Rule constantly in view, that revelation is founded on reason, and natural religion; and therefore that none of the peculiar doctrines of revealed religion can subvert that, or contradict any of its principles. The religion of nature is eternal, immutable truth, of certain and indispensable authority, and, consequently, cannot be superseded, or, in the least, altered by external revelation: and if men had always thought of this, they would never have entertained opinions, upon a pretended Scripture warrant, dishonourable to God, and destructive of the very principles of morality: they would never, for instance, have looked on any thing as the revealed truth of God, which is inconsistent with his unity, the fundamental article of all religion; never have magnified faith above virtue; or made true piety consist in outward formality; in an idle useless superstition; nay, in a violent, injurious zeal, that tramples upon the obligations of justice and charity. They would never, from a few ob-

secure passages rigorously interpreted, nay, from the mere sound of words, have conceived of the Deity as severe and implacable, slow to be appeased, but easy to be affronted; or as an arbitrary sovereign whose will is his only law; and who, without any regard to their several qualifications, has absolutely determined the happiness of a few of his creatures, and consigned over all the rest, vastly the greater number, to irremediable and endless misery. Had men, I say, formed just notions of natural religion, and considered all its principles as of invariable and necessary truth, they could never have imagined Scripture to contain such sentiments as these, which are evidently repugnant to reason; and, especially, to what the light of nature teaches concerning the unlimited goodness of the great Creator, which is so visible in the frame of the universe, and the general course of providence. Such injudicious interpreters of Scripture little consider, how much they reproach revelation itself by fathering those absurd doctrines upon it, as well as abuse their own understandings: for the religion of nature cannot but be true? What then is the consequence of making any particular revelation oppose and undermine it, but that that revelation is necessarily false?

3dly, In interpreting Scripture always regard the general scope and design of it. Let those who have leisure read whole books at once, or at least, to the end of proper periods, that they may have an entire and connected view of the things contained in them. For it must give us but confused ideas to break off in the midst of



a narration, or jumble together parts of different facts; so likewise to read only select portions out of epistles, and those, perhaps, injudiciously chosen, when there is one design pursued in the whole, and a continued reference throughout. Be careful likewise to attend to the connection of the writer, and the thread of his reasoning. For, in all writings, independent passages may be urged to serve all manner of purposes; by which means the gravest and most judicious authors may be forced to talk ludicrously, and inconsistently; and the best and most useful books, which are written with the strictest regard to virtue, be made to countenance vice and impiety.

And, indeed, it has happened, that the holy Scriptures, of all other books, have been most grossly perverted and abused this way. Common writings have, in the main, and unless in the heat of controversy, been treated with fairness and candour enough: but the writings of the Old and New Testament, by picking out of them little scraps, and separate portions, (which cannot be understood but by attending to their connection, nor urged as proofs of any thing, in opposition to the general view of the revelation, without rendering it perfectly unintelligible and useless) the sacred writings, I say, by being thus mangled and torn to pieces, have been represented as teaching the most absurd, nay, indeed, very impious and immoral doctrines. The building doctrines therefore upon single texts may lead us into great and dangerous mistakes. I might illustrate this by

a multitude of examples; but I would not be tedious, and therefore shall confine myself to one instance, *viz.* the words of the prophet Jeremiah, *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?*

This passage, divided from the context, and considered as a general independent proposition, has been used to as strange a purpose as one can well imagine, *viz.* to prove that men are not acquainted with themselves; that though self-consciousness be inseparable from, and the distinguishing excellence and privilege of their being rational, they are strangers to their own hearts, know not what their own views and intentions are, nor what the prevailing habits and dispositions of their minds. This hasty conclusion, I say, has been drawn from these words (which if it was applied to civil affairs, as it is to religion, must create the utmost confusion) not only in opposition to the general sense and experience of mankind, but quite contrary to the design of the author himself. This will evidently appear if we consider the connection, and the general reasoning that he is pursuing.

For, in the 5th verse, God is introduced as denouncing a woe against all those who fix their ultimate dependence on human power and policy. In the 7th and 8th verses is described the wisdom and happiness of trusting in the Lord, and making him our strength. Then follows the text we are considering, which by all rules of good interpretation (since there is not the least mark of the prophet's beginning

ginning a new topic of discourse) must be referred to the same argument, and contain another strong reason against making man our confidence; *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* i. e. “ There may be infinite devices and subtilties  
 “ in the hearts of men, which thou can’st not  
 “ understand: while they promise thee fair,  
 “ and make the warmest protestations of affection and zeal for thy service, their intentions may be the contrary, and their views  
 “ private and selfish: their resolutions are fickle  
 “ and mutable, and many little circumstances  
 “ may prevail with them to change their purposes; and so render their promises vain and  
 “ delusory. Nay, it is possible for them to arrive at such a pitch of premeditated and  
 “perate wickedness, as to endeavour, even  
 “ under friendly pretences, to undermine their  
 “ interest. Place not therefore thy supreme  
 “ and ultimate confidence in man, but repose  
 “ it in the unchangeable God; who, as by reason of the perfect and necessary rectitude of  
 “ his nature he cannot deceive thee, so as he is  
 “ absolute Lord of the universe, and the uncontrollable disposer of all events, he must  
 “ be able with ease to effect every thing that is  
 “ necessary for thy security and happiness.”

To the directions above mentioned about observing the general design of Scripture, and the connection of particular passages, which is necessary in interpreting all writings whatever; let me add, that it is proper for us to make some allowances for the difference of languages,



and the peculiar phrases and idioms used by the people for whom the Scriptures were originally and more immediately designed. I shall explain this a little by the words *for ever*, and *everlasting*, which are far from having the same force, in the sacred writings, as they generally have in our own language. For it is certain that they do not always signify a strict and absolute eternity, but very frequently a limited duration; and the sense of them is, in a great measure, to be determined by the subjects to which they are applied. Thus every one allows, that when we read of *everlasting* mountains, the word means very differently from what it does when God is said to be *everlasting*. Again, when it is said of Christ, that *he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end*, we are to understand no more by it, than that he shall reign to the end of the world; for *then*, we are expressly informed by St. Paul, *he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;—that God may be all in all*. In like manner, when we are told that Sodom and Gomorrah *are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, nothing more is meant than a fire that made a full end of them, and was not extinguished, till those cities, with their inhabitants, were utterly consumed. In these passages, and in some others, which seldom regard things of real importance, we must allow for the change of languages, and different use of words; and the common people will, without much difficulty, fall into the true interpretation of all passages  
of

of this kind, if they follow but the natural and easy method of comparing one part of Scripture with another.

4thly, Another Rule of great importance is, to explain dark figurative passages, parables, metaphors, allegories, &c. by such as are plain, and their sense uncontestable. Those parts of Scripture, which are expressed in the clearest and most simple manner, give a complete and rational account of the perfections and providence of God, and a noble scheme of morality. And explaining dark passages in a book, which, it is generally believed, can contain no contradictions and inconsistencies, by such as are plain and indisputable, must be allowed to be the most natural method of interpreting it. And if the common people take care to follow this method, and make any use of their reason, they cannot be misled, by the peculiar stile and phrase of Scripture, into unworthy conceptions of God, or mistake the general nature of true religion. Whereas, if they strain figures to their utmost height, and put parables and metaphors upon the rack, they may, indeed, extort strange senses from them, and draw the most wild and extravagant conclusions.

In figurative ways of speaking there is one grand point intended, which is, generally, obvious to a fair enquirer: if he goes beyond this, and argues strictly and rigorously from every circumstance, what may he not deduce from Scripture this way? Thus when the conversion and sanctification of a sinner is stiled the *regeneration*, and the *new creature*, the general design  
of

of these expressions is only this, that he entered upon a new kind of life, has thoroughly changed his principles, and methods of acting; and is, indeed, in the temper of his mind, and prevailing dispositions, quite another creature, from what he was before. But is it not most unaccountable, that any should strain this metaphor so prodigiously, as to make mankind mere machines, who can do no more towards their reformation from sin to virtue, than a dead body towards restoring itself to life, or a creature towards giving itself being; and, thereby, render all the exhortations and commands of the Gospel to repent, and turn from our evil ways, impertinent and trifling? The folly of this forced and unnatural method of interpreting is clearly seen in other instances, and universally allowed; for when it is said, that *the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*, whoever imagined, upon the bare force of this metaphor, that it will be attended with injustice and violence? And the true reason why men think justly on the one, and not on the other is, that in the one case they proceed impartially, and being under no bias, take the natural and most obvious sense of Scripture; whereas, in the other, their judgment is already determined in favour of some party scheme, which they take all opportunities and all advantages to support.

5thly, I would advise those who want leisure, opportunity, and, perhaps, capacity for critical enquiries, to read chiefly the plain parts of Scripture; those especially which describe the perfections and providence of God, or contain



practical instructions, and Gospel motives and encouragements to virtue ; and to trouble themselves but little about doubtful passages that are only incidental, and have no immediate connection with the grand design of the revelation. For if Christianity be rightly understood in its practical doctrines, and as it is a moral Rule, which, without doubt, must be the chief intention of any revelation ; other obscurities, about ancient customs, manners, sects, philosophy, &c. nay, about any points merely speculative, signify just nothing. For as God would never have given a revelation, if the errors of the world had not been of a practical nature, but consisted only in absurd theories: so differences about such things may always continue, nay the bulk of the world may know but little about them, and yet all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation, as a standing rule, be completely answered. Those who have time, and proper abilities, may commendably employ their thoughts about these lesser matters ; but others, who have neither a genius, nor opportunities for speculation, act wisely in not meddling with it, but confining themselves to more important and essential points.

In the last place, as the great end of revelation must be to promote the practice of virtue, we learn from hence a sure Rule, by which to judge of the importance of the several doctrines of it: we should lay no stress upon any but as it tends to promote a holy life, and upon all, just in proportion to their tendency to this great and desirable end. And, upon this foot, what  
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will become of most of the controversies, that have been so furiously agitated in the Christian world, in which the best part of religion is not at all concerned? Learn then to employ your chief zeal about the *weightier matters of the law, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God*; and be but little solicitous about speculative opinions, and matters of doubtful disputation. *Follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another*: for then only will you have studied the Scriptures to a right purpose, when ye have purified your souls, in obeying the truth through the spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; and learned to practise the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I have nothing farther to add, but to commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

END of the FIRST VOLUME.



















